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This issue is dedicated to Jim Abrahams, Teri Garr, Jonathan Haze, Quincy Jones, Kris Kristoferson, Maggie Smith, and the great Tony Todd.

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INVOCATION

Reconsidering Remakes

Horror fans tend, historically, to be grouchy about remakes. It's often a kneejerk response, and it is not an entirely unwarranted one. Our classics are beloved, and as much as we like to paraphrase the William Faulkner quote about the originals being safe up on a shelf, the precarious state of physical media and the whims of streamers no longer buoy that reassurance. Today, a search for a canonized title online might well yield the remake before the original, which can impact new generations discovering the first film. (To say nothing of the dreaded, "I actually prefer the remake" discourse, which is flung around a little too freely for most of our liking.) We have good reason to be protective of our classics.

But this issue of Fango presents two remakes for which I've seen no such hand-wringing, no cries of foul; quite the opposite, in fact. And I find myself wondering what the lines in the sand are for some of us.

Robert Eggers' *Nosferatu* has received almost universally positive anticipation ahead of its release. Is it because the 102-year-old original has no passionate first-generation defenders left? Has the statute of limitations passed after a century and change? Certainly remaking F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* doesn't cut as deeply as remaking *Psycho*, or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, or whatever you saw when you were 12 that rewired your brain forever.

Leigh Whannell's *Wolf Man* is another example, though the specifics are different. With this film, there is now an established pattern of Whannell taking a classic title (as he did with *The Invisible Man*) and running in a new, wildly unexpected direction. It's possibly the bravest, most honorable tactic one can take with remaking a well-loved title – as well as the riskier one. Is his novel approach the reason horror fans aren't doing the usual mob-and-pitchfork thing about this remake?

Both these properties have been remade before, of course, which probably softens the blow somewhat. But maybe getting our backs up about remakes is a generational thing at this point, and the younger crowd is more accepting of it. Certainly the glut of Stephen King remakes in the past couple years indicates we're all a bit less precious about the idea. But these two films dropping within a month of each other feels like a milestone, and a shift. We have two of horror's best filmmakers, at the top of their game, revisiting classic titles: one making the most opulent, reverent, lush version of one of the genre's first entries; and one sneaking in a total original under the guise of an established brand.

Remakes have not, in this writer's opinion, been this exciting since the *Thing/Fly/Blob* trifecta of the 1980s. Perhaps they're turning a corner this year.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

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YESFERATU!

Hello Fangoria:

I am very much looking forward to Robert Eggers' rendition of *Nosferatu* for much of the same reasons that have already been written about.

Werner Herzog's remake of the classic was great as well, especially with his panning shots and scenery – the entire mood that he set – but one of my main criticisms was that he tried to go back and use the names from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* instead of the ones that F.W. Murnau created. When Murnau made his unauthorized version of *Dracula* that would become our favorite Symphony of Horror, in changing the names and placing the entire story in Germany, specifically the small town of Wisborg, he made his own mythology, his own world. The Graf von Orlok might have inspirations from the terrible old man that is Stoker's Count, but he is his own plague-ridden entity, and I feel like as Phil put it, Eggers is going to double down and expand on that mythos.

At the same time, what I am really excited about is that there is an addition or a change to the original Murnau storyline in the form of Willem Dafoe's Professor Albin Eberhart Von Franz. It's not just that the man who played "Max Schreck" in E. Elias Merhige and Steven Katz's *Shadow of the Vampire* is now embodying the opposite role, it's that it sounds like Eggers actually improved on the character of Professor Bulwer, a much milder and in some ways more ineffectual version of Doctor Van Helsing. I don't even believe that Bulwer thought Ellen was telling the truth about a vampire, or believed in them himself. Albin Eberhart Von Franz, named after Albin Grau, the producer and set designer of *Nosferatu* – as well as an occultist in his own right – and the Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz, seems to be more of a throwback to Van Helsing, though his leaning seems to be more towards mysticism and arcane lore as opposed to the medicine of his literary predecessor. Among other things, I really look forward to seeing how Willem Dafoe's Von Franz deals with Bill Skarsgård's von Orlok.

And truly, I think this will be a fun new rendition of an excellent Symphony. - Matthew Kirshenblatt

Matthew, by the time this sees print you'll have seen Eggers' Nosferatu, *and I'm darn curious what you thought of it! For me, it was an epic, lovingly rendered extrapolation of the original, with visual and aural design to die for. I'm excited to see it again. - PN*

Hey Phil!

After a recent watch of Eggers' take on *Nosferatu*, I can't help but think about how it's one of the more faithful adaptations of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to ever grace the screen. Do you think films that attempt to adapt the character benefit from following the source material more closely or by putting their own unique spin on the character and mythos? (Looking at you, Hammer films)

-Reyna Cervantes (she/her)

Reyna, is this about the mustache? It's about the mustache, isn't it? I will admit that I was stunned by how much Eggers went for "authentic Transylvanian nobleman" with his Orlok, especially with the inclusion of that luxurious goulash strainer. But after the first act, I don't know that this was any more faithful an adaptation of Stoker's book than, say, Coppola's or even Tod Browning's. To me it's such a thoughtful redux of Murnau's film specifically, *that it cuts Herzog's out of the mix entirely. It's Eggers in conversation with the original, which he has obviously studied very closely.*

In answer to your query, Dracula is one of the most-adapted literary characters in history, and I think the only thing worth doing at this point is getting weird and original with it. - PN

FIRE BAD

Can immolations be over? It feels like this decade has been aflame with baddies, goodies, and everyone in between going up in smoke (*Sick*, *Smile*, *5cream*, *The First Omen*, etc). I get it: with CGI, flame-age is easier than ever to accomplish onscreen, but let's throw some water on this uninspired trend.

Best,
Rocco T. Thompson

Rocco, now that you mention it, I suppose this is a trope that's been going for a… hot minute. (Sorry.) I blame Ari Aster! - PN

MONSTER INVASION

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

ELRIC KANE AND WEBB WILCOXEN DO

THE DEAD THING

SHUDDER'S NEW MOVIE IS A TIMELY AND GORY PARABLE.

BEN SMITH-PETERSEN (ALSO PICTURED OPPOSITE WITH BLU HUNT) MAY NOT BE *THE DEAD THING*, BUT HE CERTAINLY SEEMS TO BE A DEAD THING.

Alex (Blu Hunt), the protagonist of *The Dead Thing*, is going through the dating trials that any number of modern 20-somethings have experienced. Through a dating app on her phone, she meets a series of men, hooks up with them, and then, end of story. Hers is a sex life, not a love life – until she encounters Kyle (Ben Smith-Petersen), who is handsome and charming, and they spend a wonderful night together. But then that romantic promise evaporates as he essentially disappears, not responding to any of her attempts to contact him. He has ghosted her – and considering the movie's title, could that be literal? Perhaps, but Alex's determination to track Kyle down precipitates a whole series of frightening discoveries and situations.

The Dead Thing will appropriately (or maybe ironically) debut on Shudder on Valentine's Day, February 14, following a successful festival tour, beginning with a world premiere at Montreal's Fantasia, where FANGORIA spoke with its creators. One of them is no stranger to our followers: Elric Kane, who directed the film and scripted it with Webb Wilcoxen, has co-hosted Fango's *Colors of the Dark* podcast (formerly *Shock Waves*) with Rebekah McKendry for some time now. (He also co-hosts the weekly *Pure Cinema Podcast* with Brian Saur.) Kane and Wilcoxen first met when the former became an associate producer on Oren Shai's neo-noir thriller *Frontier*, which the latter co-wrote, and their initial collaboration was a screenplay called *Unformed*, which lay "somewhere between arthouse and adult horror," according to Kane.

Anxious to come up with a project he could helm himself, Kane found inspiration on a note that popped up on one of his own phone apps. "It just said, 'Dating app: Horror??' and it was there for maybe a year and a half before we even got into a conversation about a movie," he says. "I was also having these strange conversations with a secretary at my work, who was lively and very young, and would go out every single night, pretty much. I'd come in the next day and she'd recount all these dates she was going on, from a bunch of apps. The stories were more comedic than they were dark, but they definitely set my mind spinning."

"Elric lives in Los Angeles and I live in New York," Wilcoxen says, "and we get on these phone calls while he's stuck in LA traffic and work through our story ideas. One day he said, 'I have this thought: a dating app, a supernatural element,' and we started to explore it. For me, thinking about when I was in my 20s and dating the wrong people, and missed connections and the dread of being alone, and getting involved with the wrong people at the wrong time, helped fuel the idea of this young woman looking for something to be consumed by. Then she finds it, but it may be something she shouldn't get involved in."

The two were determined to create a horror film grounded in character, with a theme relevant to our current times. The app

PHOTOS BY STAR ROSENCRANS • COURTESY OF ELRIC KANE

inspiration certainly qualified, though as Kane notes, "Filmmakers, including us, usually avoid anything to do with a cell phone. It's the thing we try to eliminate right away [*laughs*]! So it was like, if we take the thing we least want and actually lean into it, but not make the cheesy version where a demon's jumping out of a phone, how do we involve it in an organic way?"

One breakthrough in that regard was inspired once again by a true event, this time in Wilcoxen's life. "I had just moved to London with my family at that time," he recounts, "and on morning one, I was jet-lagged and we were walking down the street, and a bicyclist went by, and his wallet fell out of his pocket into what I thought was a bike lane. So I jumped into the lane, grabbed the wallet and got back on the curb, and a second later, a double-decker bus roared by. And I realized, 'Holy shit, I almost just got flattened in front of my wife and son.' We kind of laughed it off at first, and then about three days later, it started to hit me how close I was to being eliminated. That inspired this growing existential dread, where my mind just became obsessed with my demise."

That brush with mortality helped them flesh out Alex's emotional life, and the increasingly dire circumstances she finds herself in. The crucial component then became finding the right pair of actors who could properly evoke their roles, maintain audience empathy while sometimes doing the wrong things, and had the right chemistry. Kane had been impressed with Hunt's turn in *The New Mutants*, but what helped clinch the decision to cast her was, appropriately enough, her Instagram page.

"It was very modern," Kane recalls, "and the way she looked out of the frame of every photo, she had this very distinct gaze that I was kind of drawn to. And all her posts were about horror films or Robert Altman films, so I was like, 'OK, she has interesting tastes.' I looked at a lot of other actresses, but she was on my mind the whole search. Eventually, my casting director got the script to her manager, and we jumped on Zoom after she read it, and she said, 'I really love your *Pure Cinema Podcast*.' I don't think I've ever been so glad I did that podcast than the moment she said that."

When it came to casting Kyle, on the other hand, the only actor they considered with Smith-Petersen, who also has considerable stunt experience on the likes of *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Furiosa*. "I saw maybe 100 people for Alex, and for Kyle I just saw one tape, which was Ben's," Kane reveals. "It touched me and moved me and there was something about him I found intriguing. We did have to think, he's 6-foot-4 or something and Blu is 5-foot-whatever [*laughs*], so we were concerned before seeing them physically together. And then in their first scene, he kind of leaned into her and she leaned up, and we were like, 'It's gonna work!'"

In addition, Smith-Petersen's stunt background became an advantage when it came to shooting the numerous intimate moments between Alex and Kyle. There wasn't enough in the *Dead Thing* budget for an intimacy coordinator, so as Kane explains, "It was pretty helpful to have a stuntperson involved. Sex scenes and things like that are kind of like stunts; they're not erotic or exciting when you're on set, because it's about practically pulling them off. Even though it's a different situation, it's still about comfort and safety.

"Blu was comfortable with everything," he continues, "and our DP was a woman [Ioana Vasile], and I only say that because she was so physically close to Blu with the camera, so that created another layer of trust on set. I don't know how far we would have gone if she didn't feel safe."

That sense of security gave Hunt and Smith-Petersen the freedom to find the deepest, darkest emotional truths of *The Dead Thing*, keeping even the most extreme scenes plausible – which was one of the filmmakers' key goals. "We both have an interest in writing stories where everything is believable," Wilcoxen says. "We're not asking audiences to take a huge leap, where there's a supernatural element that would be unbelievable if it happened in real life. Larry Fessenden's *Habit* was a big inspiration for us; that was a '90s horror romance, and we talked about that film and wanted to find what that would be now, with cell phones. It's not meeting someone at a party, it's meeting someone through an app. We live so much of our lives digitally, and we really wanted to explore that." 💀

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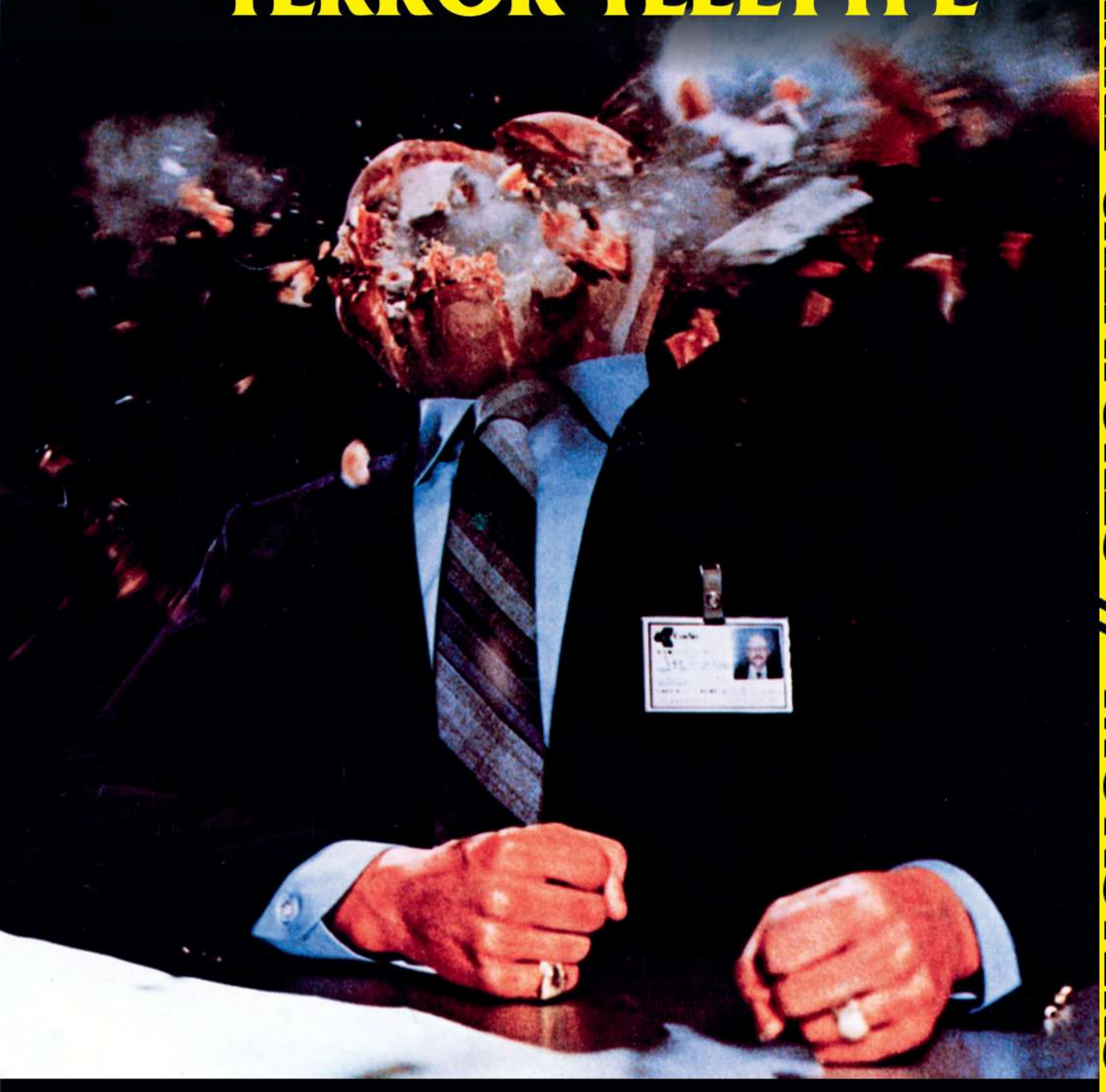

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L-R: ELI ROTH, JACK BLACK AND FRED RASKIN ARE ALL SMILES.

FANGO INTERN MADE GOOD: PART THREE

WRAPPING UP OUR CONVERSATION WITH FILM EDITOR AND FANGORIA ALUM FRED RASKIN.

Former 1994 FANGORIA intern Fred Raskin continues to live a charmed life. As a much-in-demand editor, he has worked for Hollywood's best and brightest directors, including S. Craig Zahler (*Bone Tomahawk*), Justin Lin (*Fast 5*), Eli Roth (*The House with a Clock in its Walls*) and James Gunn (*Guardians of the Galaxy*), to name a few.

But it is his collaboration with fellow fanboy-turned-pro Quentin Tarantino that has proven the most fruitful of Raskin's career. In the final chapter of our gargantuan talk, Raskin provides insights into the Tarantino method.

How would you describe Tarantino's working methods when you became editor on *Django Unchained*?

I really liked his style. While he was shooting, I was free to just do my own thing. Cutting *Django*, the pressure was really on. This was my first time working with this director in this capacity, and God only knew what he was going to expect of me. He

had a legendary, terrific editor [Sally Menke] that he'd worked with on all of his movies, and how was I going to possibly compare? It was a pretty daunting task. There were big shoes that I had to fill, and it was a good thing that I was single and had no children [*laughs*]. I spent every spare minute I had working on that movie. So that when he came in, we were ready to go.

He always shoots more than he needs. Any resultant challenges?

The good news is, he has a very good sense of what is actually going to end up in the movie. As he's making his way through the shooting, he starts to understand, 'This scene probably isn't going to make it.' So, when he came into the cutting room, he was like, 'OK, this scene that you probably think is the most important scene in the whole movie, it's not actually going to be in the movie. Ultimately, the picture can work without it. It's going to be a long movie, so we need to be cognizant of that from the beginning.'

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRED RASKIN

FRANKLY, FRED HAS NEVER LOOKED BETTER.

How smooth was your transition from assistant to sole editor for Tarantino?

On *Django*, it went as smoothly as it could have. He'd worked with one editor for his entire career, so it was a little scary, like, 'How's he going to react to working with me? I'm not Sally.' I had a 'WWSD?' sign up on my Avid to refer to: 'What Would Sally Do?' It was really just, 'I'm going to work as hard as I possibly can.' Working with Quentin is what you might expect: We spend about 70 percent of our day working on the movie and getting it as good as it can be, and about 30 percent of our day just talking about movies [*laughs*]. His childlike enthusiasm has never left him. It's always a joy to get to work with him. And the more we've worked together, the more he's come to trust me.

The Spahn Ranch scene in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* echoes *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

That sense of dread was in the script, particularly the idea that something horrible could happen to Cliff. Having potentially murdered his wife does set him up as a character who could die at any moment because there's something shady in his past. So, I'm turning every script page, thinking, 'What horrible thing is going to befall him?' The Manson family becomes the *Texas Chain Saw* family. After watching the first dailies, I told Quentin, 'I was expecting this to have the vibe of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, but no, this *is The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.' We actually ended up echoing that in the sound design. When I'm editing for Quentin, he generally doesn't want me using music. To create that level of tension without music meant I was going to have to rely on the sound effects. So, I talked with sound supervisor Wylie Stateman, and we used some of those creepy, weird sounds that you associate with *Chain Saw*, like when Cliff enters Spahn Ranch. Having these low tones throughout really elevate the sense of dread. While it's true there's very little on my résumé that actually plays as straight horror, that sequence certainly has the tension of a good horror movie.

Do you want to add more horror to your résumé?

I would love to. I love horror movies, and if the opportunity presented itself, I would certainly jump at the chance. But I take the movies that are the most appealing to me, and that's often about the filmmakers with whom I want to work. There have been a handful of opportunities for horror movies that have just come up while I was doing something else. There's no shame in cutting a Quentin Tarantino movie and not cutting whatever horror movie might be interested in me. I'm very cognizant of how incredibly fortunate I've been. I definitely don't take it for granted getting to work with people like Justin Lin, James Gunn, Eli Roth and Quentin. I've been truly blessed. There's a lot of stuff on my bucket list that I would love to hit. Hopefully one day the opportunity will present itself.

Is directing also on that list?

It is. I have to find the right project. That was where I started and what I intended to do from the beginning. The experiences that I've had with the directors with whom I've worked would certainly inform my abilities as a filmmaker. I'm well-prepared, but to quote Mike Tyson, 'Everybody's got a plan until they get hit.' I'm quite certain that if I were to sit in the director's chair, I would discover just how difficult it truly is. 💀

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Michael Gingold's

Exordium

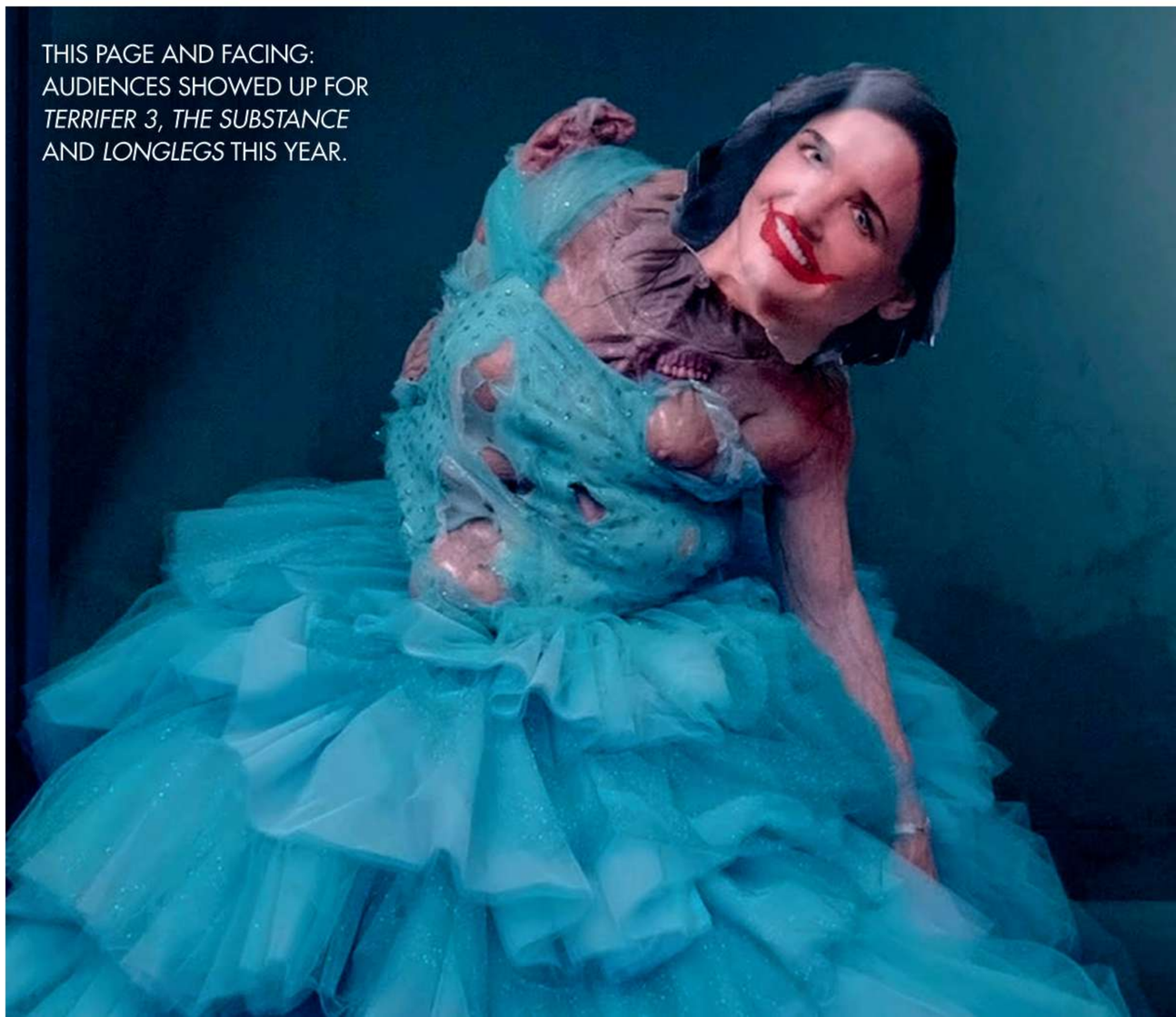
Horror Hits, Wherefore Art Thou

As *Terrifier 3* blows away box office records, what expectations can we draw for genre successes going forward?

As I write this, it has been a few weeks since *Terrifier 3* began its theatrical release and startled a lot of people by topping the box office charts. The latest adventure of Art the Clown took in $18.9 million in its first weekend, far outpacing *Joker: Folie à Deux*. It has since become the highest-grossing unrated independent horror movie in history, a success story that has led to speculation that we'll soon see a wave of similar shockers getting nationwide release.

While *Terrifier 3* has certainly offered heretofore unseen evidence that an übergory title from outside the studios can break out in the moviegoing mainstream, I'd be more convinced of its lasting impact if it wasn't one of the few exceptions, not the overall rule, when it comes to off-Hollywood fear fare this year. There have been other success stories: Coralie Fargeat's brilliant *The Substance* will be propelled by word of mouth past the $16-million mark. That's a solid figure for such a confrontational, unconventional film, especially from a new distributor (MUBI). NEON delivered the 2024 indie-fright scene's one bona fide smash with the Nicolas Cage freakout *Longlegs*, which took in $74.3 million, while IFC Films had its first breakout horror hit with the wildly entertaining *Late Night with the Devil*, which squeaked just past the $10-million mark.

The results, sadly, were not so hot for 2024's other wide indie genre releases. *In a Violent Nature*, *Oddity*, *Arcadian*, *Cuckoo*, *Strange Darling*, *The Exorcism*, *Elevation*,



THIS PAGE AND FACING: AUDIENCES SHOWED UP FOR *TERRIFER 3*, *THE SUBSTANCE* AND *LONGLEGS* THIS YEAR.

Out of Darkness and *Sting* mostly won strong reviews, but none achieved grosses over $6.5 million. Then there was Lionsgate's unfortunate triumvirate of *Never Let Go*, *The Crow* and *Boy Kills World*, along with the high-profile *Immaculate* from NEON and *MaXXXine* from A24, which both topped out around $15 million. I'm not trying to harp on bad news here, just to perhaps temper the expectations engendered by *T3*'s grosses.

There were a few fright films that scored this year, though they illustrate an unfortunate paradox. Fans of the form often assert that they want more original visions, but almost all the horror fare that scored biggest in '24 has been sequels: *A Quiet Place: Day One*, *Alien: Romulus*, and *Smile 2*, not to mention *T3* itself. Those first three movies generated quite a bit more cash than non-IP studio releases like *Trap*, *Speak No Evil* (a remake, though it likely wasn't recognized as such by a lot of the mass audience), *Night Swim*, *Abigail*, *Blink Twice*, *The Watchers* and *Tarot*. An odd exception to this trend, given how many fright buffs apparently enjoyed it, was *The First Omen*, which only took in $20 million.

Again, I'm not trying to ring the death knell here; horror has always had its on and off years, and could easily come roaring back in 2025. One lesson here, perhaps, is a painful one, which is that not every low-budget scare show can sustain a break in over 1,000 theaters nationwide. I loved the fact that *The Substance* was exposed to so many moviegoers, but some of the other aforementioned films might have benefitted from carefully handled, smartly marketed platform releases.

Indeed, another lesson of 2024 is that marketing is key. NEON did a sterling, suggestive job promoting *Longlegs*, stoking curiosity about the movie and Cage's role in it. And the *Terrifier* team has managed to curate that franchise into something that feels like a dare: Can you take it?

Art himself is, of course, the key to the *Terrifier* phenomenon. A recent visit to the Monster Mania convention in Oaks, PA, made that clear, as vendor table after vendor table sported handcrafted Art merch. Attendees were dressed as the character, and the *T3* filmmakers and cast drew long lines for autographs and photo ops. During a break in that action, I got a few words with writer/director Damien Leone, who acknowledged Art's mass appeal – and his finger-knived forebear.

"Every time we make something with this character," he says, "we underestimate what it's going to do, and how big the fan base has grown. There's a charm to Art that I honestly think has been missing in slashers since Freddy Krueger. People were yearning for a character like that again, and Art captured a little bit of that essence. He kind of breaks the fourth wall, and tells the audience that it's OK to enjoy this, it's just a movie. We're here to have fun, and don't take this too seriously. I believe that's what's resonating with the masses, because a lot of people told me that this was just a niche movie, that it could only go so far, that the graphic violence would alienate a lot of people, and it had just a small, hardcore fan base. But clearly that's not the case."

There is one other, more recent horror villain who likely helped set the table for Art's success: Pennywise, the murderous Dancing Clown of the *It* movies. Leone agrees: "I think clowns always had the potential to appeal to the masses. I remember when I was trying to shop *Terrifier*, it was before the first *It* movie came out, and I told the producer of [the Art anthology] *All Hallows' Eve*, 'Hey, man, everything is cyclical in this genre, and I think clowns are really going to hit.' And he said, 'You know, I've asked around, and nobody believes in clowns. Clowns can't sell a movie.' I'll never forget that line: 'Clowns can't sell a movie.' And then *It* came out, and it became the highest-grossing horror film ever. So there you go." 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DARK AGE CINEMA, MUBI AND NEON

SceneQueen

RE-ANIMATOR At 40 PART 1

IN HONOR OF ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY, BARBARA SPEAKS WITH THE CAST AND CREW WHO HELPED HER MAKE STUART GORDON'S CULT CLASSIC.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

This new year marks the 40th anniversary of *Re-Animator*. It's the film that started it all for me: a leading role, a first step on my lifelong horror journey, and my first collaboration with director Stuart Gordon. A career as an actor is full of ups and downs, but you never know around what corner you're going to meet your new destiny. To have been lucky enough to star in this cult classic, a movie that has been cherished by horror fans old and new over the course of four decades, is a gift. I had no way of knowing, when I accepted the role of Meg Halsey, that this film would become such an important part of my legacy of making frightening fare. So here I am. I will never forget where it all began, or lose sight of my gratitude for that first opportunity.

THE FUTURE WAS SO BRIGHT FOR THIS CULT CLASSIC, THE STARS (BRUCE ABBOTT AND BARBARA CRAMPTON) HAD TO WEAR SHADES.

Re-Animator was based on a story written by H.P. Lovecraft titled "Herbert West – Reanimator," first serialized in a publication called *Home Brew* in 1922. At the time, Lovecraft was not as famous or widely known as other writers of the day, but his atmospheric tales of mostly cosmic frights have been building in popularity for decades. Jump forward to 1983: businessman Brian Yuzna was attempting a foray into the movie industry. He put an ad in *Variety* announcing that he was looking for a director. Bob Greenberg, visual effects artist on John Carpenter's *Dark Star*, answered the ad. Bob encouraged Brian to go to Chicago to meet with his buddy Stuart Gordon, who was then running The Organic Theater Company with his wife Carolyn Purdy-Gordon. (Famous alums include Joe Mantegna and George Wendt!)

"Stuart already had the idea to make *Re-Animator* [as a television series], and he and friends Bill Norris and Dennis Paoli had written a pilot," Brian reveals. "But I wasn't interested in that. I wanted to make a movie. I watched a few of [Stuart's] productions in Chicago, and we really hit it off. I had great confidence in him. He went along with my idea to make a movie instead, and we all began working on the film version."

The only other feature Paoli had written was a Christopher Reeve TV movie called *Mortal Sins*. Stuart and Dennis were longtime friends from high school and college, and this collaboration – from story to pilot to feature – would foreshadow Stuart's habit of working with the same troupe of friends throughout his career. Dennis was a professor of Gothic Fiction at Hunter College by this time, so he took time out on weekends, and before and after classes, to write up this tale of a young scientist who could bring dead things back to life. Brian financed the movie the same way indie producers do today: with help from a collection of friends and family, his own money and people with extra cash that he knew, like the folks behind Record Bar in North Carolina.

Anthony Barnao was brought in to cast the movie. He had seen my co-star Jeffrey Combs in a play at the Zephyr Theater, a small stage in Los Angeles. Jeff says of his on-stage role, "I played a character who exuded arrogance and superiority to everyone around him, just like Herbert West. But for that character it was a defense mechanism to cover his insecurity and trauma. For me it was simple enough to jettison the feeling of vulnerability in order to play West with total, self-assured, uncompromising authority."

The first gal to be cast as Meg turned the role down after her mother read the script and told her she shouldn't do it. Was it because of the famous scene in which Meg is defiled by a creepy doctor [David Gale] brandishing his own head and behaving like a slobbering, sex-starved maniac? We may never know.

And to be honest, that scene did give me pause. I found solace in my decision to take the role because the character of Meg had agency and smarts, and a deep love for her boyfriend Dan Cain [Bruce Abbott] and her zombified father [Robert Sampson]. Surely, I thought, that would save me from just being a "bubble-headed coed," as Herbert West refers to my character.

…Also, my mother didn't read the script.

Stay tuned for Part 2 in our next issue, as Barbara talks with co-star Bruce Abbott, composer Richard Band and more!

IT'S **CLEAR**!, AFTER HER MEMORABLE ROLE AS MEG HALSEY, THAT THE AUTHOR WAS MEANT TO BE A BIG STAR. (PICTURED HERE L-R, WITH CAROLYN PURDY-GORDON, ABBOTT AND BARBARA PIETERS.)

Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

A MAGICAL ~~LAND~~ GENRE WHERE BULLETS DON'T HURT

EXAMINING THE BULLETPROOF NATURE OF OUR SLASHER FAVES.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON KAUZLARICH

DR. LOOMIS (DONALD PLEASENCE) LEARNS THE HARD WAY THAT GUNS DON'T MAKE MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE TO MICHAEL MYERS.

At the end of the 1978 *Halloween*, Dr. Loomis empties his revolver into Michael Myers' chest, which sends Michael falling backwards off the balcony of a two-story house, where we see him lying on the lawn, thoroughly shot, put down at last. Yet, when Loomis looks over that railing to confirm this long night is over… nope. Michael's gone. This long night has only just begun.

In the space of a single scene in *Friday the 13th VI: Jason Lives*, Jason Voorhees is shot three times point-blank with a shotgun, then four times with a pistol – one of those shots through his hockey mask. Yet, following Michael's unsettling lead, he pops right back up.

We all know slashers, animated by evil, by revenge, by the need to kill, by the need to protect their territory, that they can suffer massive amounts of damage and still keep right on slashing – it's a big reason why we love them, and it's definitely why franchises are built around them: each installment, they're ba-ack. From Chucky to Victor Crowley, putting a slasher down is a lot harder than it would seem.

If it were as easy as shooting them? Then that would mean police in slashers could suddenly be effective, which would suggest parents and adults in general are useful, that they actually come running when the kids raise the alarm, and… is that really a slasher? No, the role all the various authorities play in the slasher is to laugh, deny, try to shrug this all off as overactive imaginations, which serves to isolate the kids, making them rely on themselves to survive. It's no accident that the Golden Age of the slasher coincides with the latchkey-kid era, is it? When kids had to fend for themselves until dinner?

So, slashers being effectively bulletproof, that A) makes them scarier, since the "final solution" – guns – are no solution at all B) serves to isolate the victim pool, which allows for more heroism, more of that "rugged individualism" America's been valorizing since forever, and C) it lets the series unfold without attempting to swap antagonists, a switch that threatens to lose the audience, as they're already invested in this mask, that location, whatever "reason."

None of this is wrong, but neither is it a complete explanation why slashers can shake off gunshots.

I propose that one reason they're bulletproof has a lot to do with the simple fact that slashers themselves hardly ever use guns, which, in the peculiar algebra of the slasher genre, thus makes them functionally immune to guns.

As for why they don't use guns, it feels like it's something akin to (the Hollywood conception of) Bushidō, that moral code that controls a samurai's attitude, behavior, and lifestyle. Just imagine Bushidō as it applies to Leslie Vernon: same way it would be undignified, even gauche, to be seen actually running, it would be a loss of honor to hide in the bushes with a rifle and shoot these partiers through the windows of the house.

Slashers prefer the up-close-and personal kills, which require intimate weapons, usually of the bladed variety. Sure, Jason will use a speargun, a weedwacker, whatever's handy in a pinch, but his fallback weapon is always the machete, isn't it? And is there any more up close and personal weapon than Freddy's glove?

So: "honor." You wouldn't think slashers traffic in that kind of human

JASON LIVES, ALL RIGHT. HE LIVES AND HE LIVES AND HE LIVES.

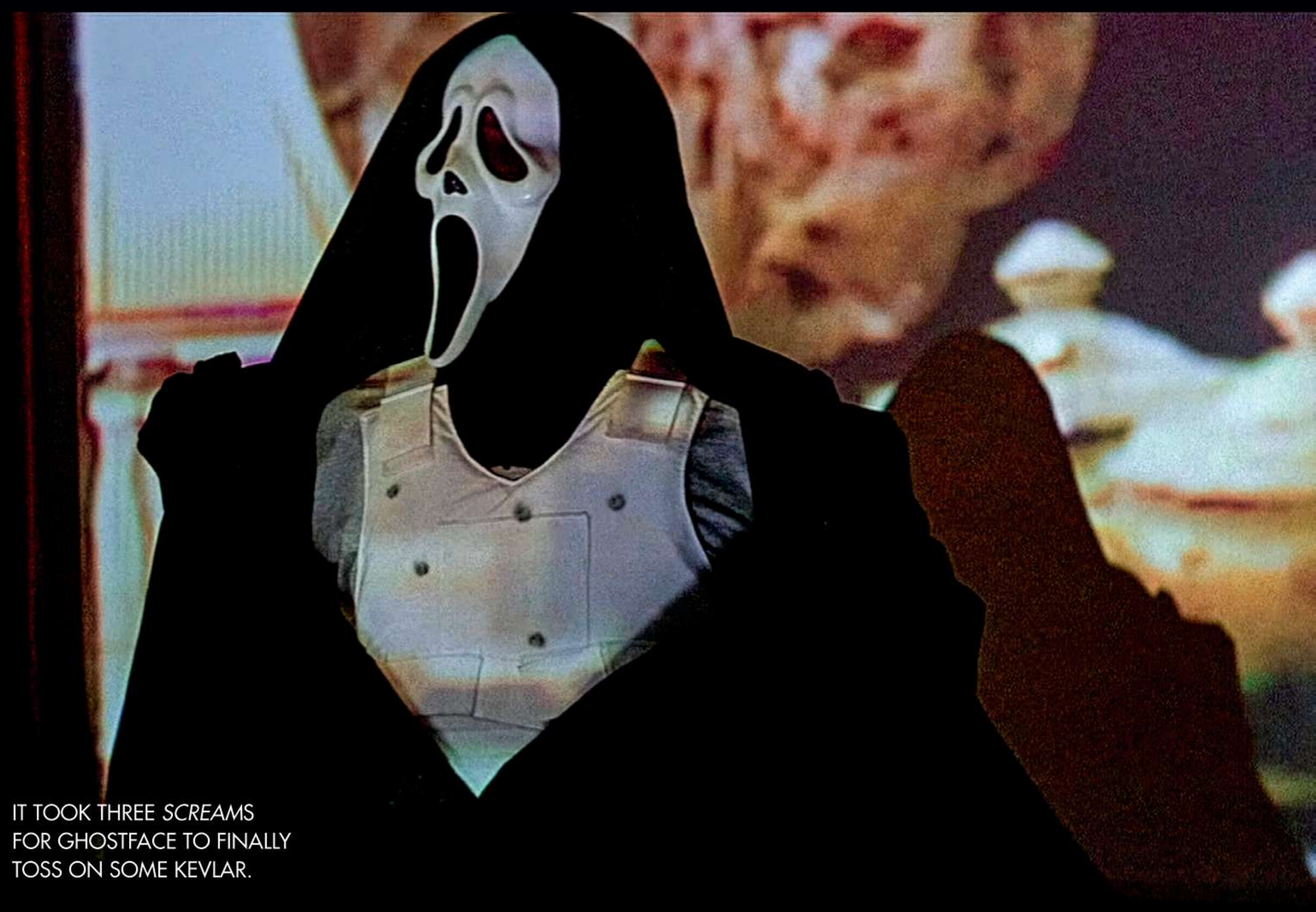
nonsense, but they do seem to have a code. Were Jason ever to hear of Michael becoming The Fastest Gun in Haddonfield, you can just hear him hissing disgust behind his hockey mask, can't you?

Too, using blades instead of firearms, that keeps the slasher from shading over into the land of the serial- or spree-killer, doesn't it? Serial killers and spree killers, featured in a whole slew of films – usually one-offs, as they don't franchise out well – they tend to be going for the highest bodycount, which (*We Need to Talk About Kevin* aside) usually means guns, not blades.

Slashers, though, they like to look you in the eye while their knife's in your chest, don't they? It's because what they're often after, it's something that feels like justice – they want you to know it's them doing this. And even when it's not a revenge slasher, still, this slasher's nevertheless extracting what they need from this kill that's very much in your personal space.

So, "honor" and "contradistinction" and "revenge" are a few reasons slashers don't elect to go the firepower route. And since they're not stooping to pick pistols and rifles and shotguns up – we've yet to see a musket or a blunderbuss come into play – they're more or less making those weapons "out of bounds," taking their typical effectiveness away, making themselves functionally bulletproof.

And, yes, there's always the fallback of body armor under that Father Death robe, which Roman Bridger, the Ghostface of the third *Scream*, quite surprisingly uses – and, talking *Scream*, Sidney's bullet to Billy's forehead is finally enough, yes. And, that slasher response team that takes Jason out in *Jason Goes to Hell* does finally get enough lead into Jason to take him down. Well, to slow him down so they can blow him up, anyway. But



IT TOOK THREE *SCREAMS* FOR GHOSTFACE TO FINALLY TOSS ON SOME KEVLAR.

firepower does work, never mind that Jason's no more dead than Michael was in 1978.

Still, by and large, slashers can't be stopped by guns, can they?

Part of this, I think, is that being bulletproof is one of the qualifying characteristics for something being "more than human" – for something graduating to real-true "monster" status. We like our monsters to get taken down by cleverness, not brute strength. Us finding their Achilles' heel confirms our intelligence, and we like nothing better than to pat ourselves on the back. If it makes us feel smart, it's good.

But what often finally takes a slasher down? That same poetic justice they like to dish out, install-ment after installment. How many times does Freddy finally get killed by his own knife fingers? Isn't the magic of *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* little Tommy Jarvis swinging that signature machete into Jason? And what of Sidney using the voice-changer to call Billy, and then wearing that iconic mask to come at him? Slashers might be immune to bullets, but they're susceptible to turnabout – it's very fair play, in this genre.

Still, my take on why slashers are bulletproof is finally more simple: firearms are hopelessly ineffective against ghosts. I submit that slashers, being reminders of past crimes or pranks or tragic backstories, are functionally ghosts, no matter how distinctly corporeal they are.

You can shoot a ghost, sure, but the ghost doesn't much care, does it?

It just keeps on coming.

It's the same with Micheal, with Jason, with Freddy, with Victor and Chucky – with all of them, even Ghostface, whose ticket past getting shot in the forehead point-blank is passing that mask on to the next mystery killer, and then the one after that, on into the unknowable, but surely bloody, future.

We'd have it no other way. 💀

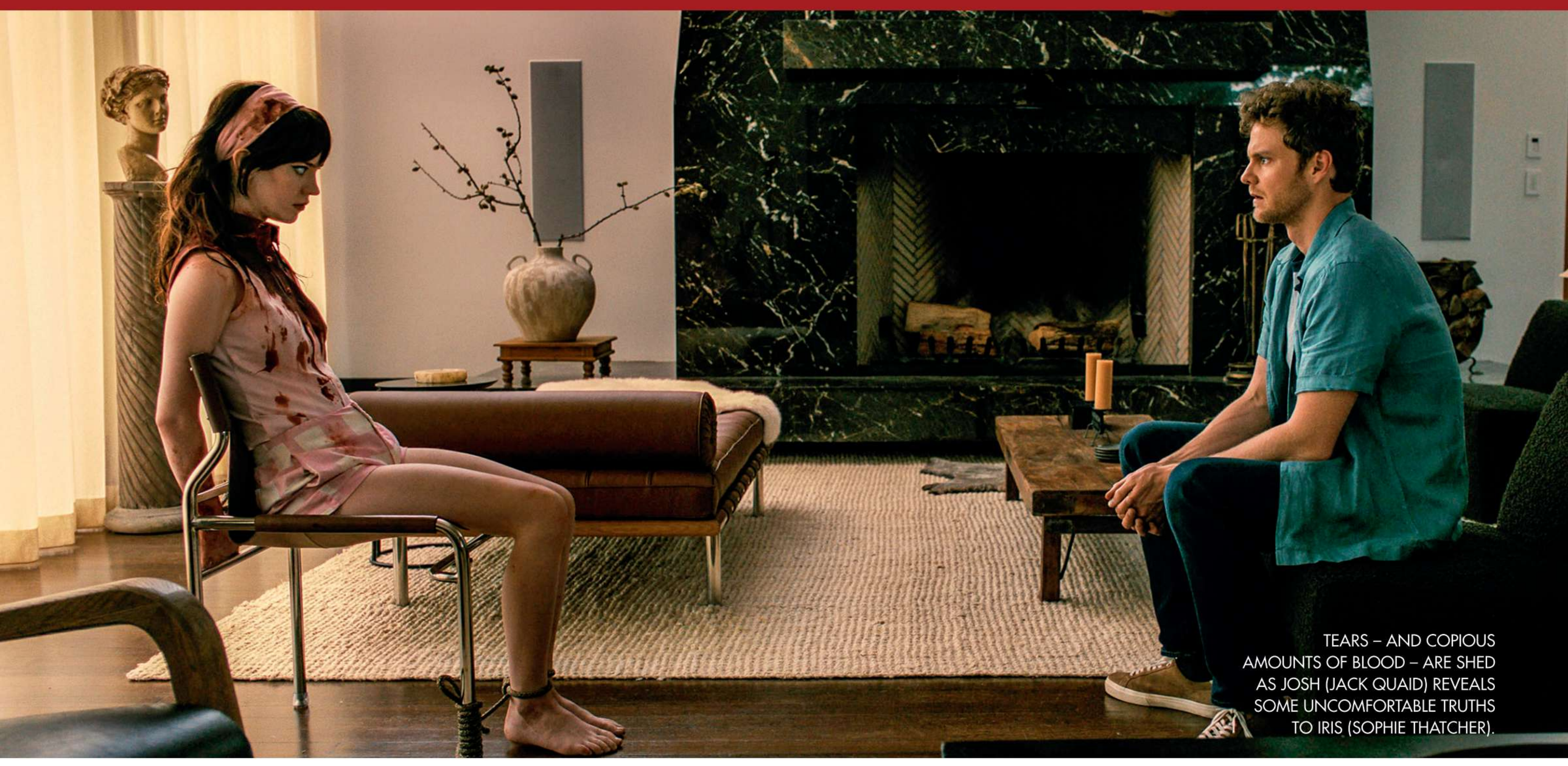
JASON TAKES ABOUT A BILLION BULLETS TO THE CHEST, BUT HE STILL DOESN'T *GO TO HELL* UNTIL A GRENADE AND A MAGIC BLADE JOIN THE PARTY.

Companion

COMPELS YOU TO COME IN COLD

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

You're best off not knowing anything beforehand about Drew Hancock's debut feature — but he, Sophie Thatcher and Jack Quaid do a decent job of keeping the goods hidden.



TEARS – AND COPIOUS AMOUNTS OF BLOOD – ARE SHED AS JOSH (JACK QUAID) REVEALS SOME UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS TO IRIS (SOPHIE THATCHER).

Jack Quaid does not want you to read this article. "If you were already going to go see this movie anyway, don't read anything else," the actor implores. "Don't watch any more trailers. Go in as blind as you possibly can. I promise you it's worth it."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

An admirable sentiment, but as readers of FANGORIA know, there's nothing we hate more than a film afraid of being spoiled. This is a magazine that loves to give you the goods, that delights in showing you the moments no one else will (see page 28). When we're tasked with featuring a movie that demands we protect its precious secrets, we'd just as soon pass on covering it.

But we've seen *Companion* and, honestly, we're not sure Mr. Quaid is wrong here. And if *we're* on board to protect the secrets of *Companion*, you can be sure it's a very special film indeed. And so we're going to attempt to thread this spoilery needle to preserve what we believe will be a unique experience for you, the viewer.

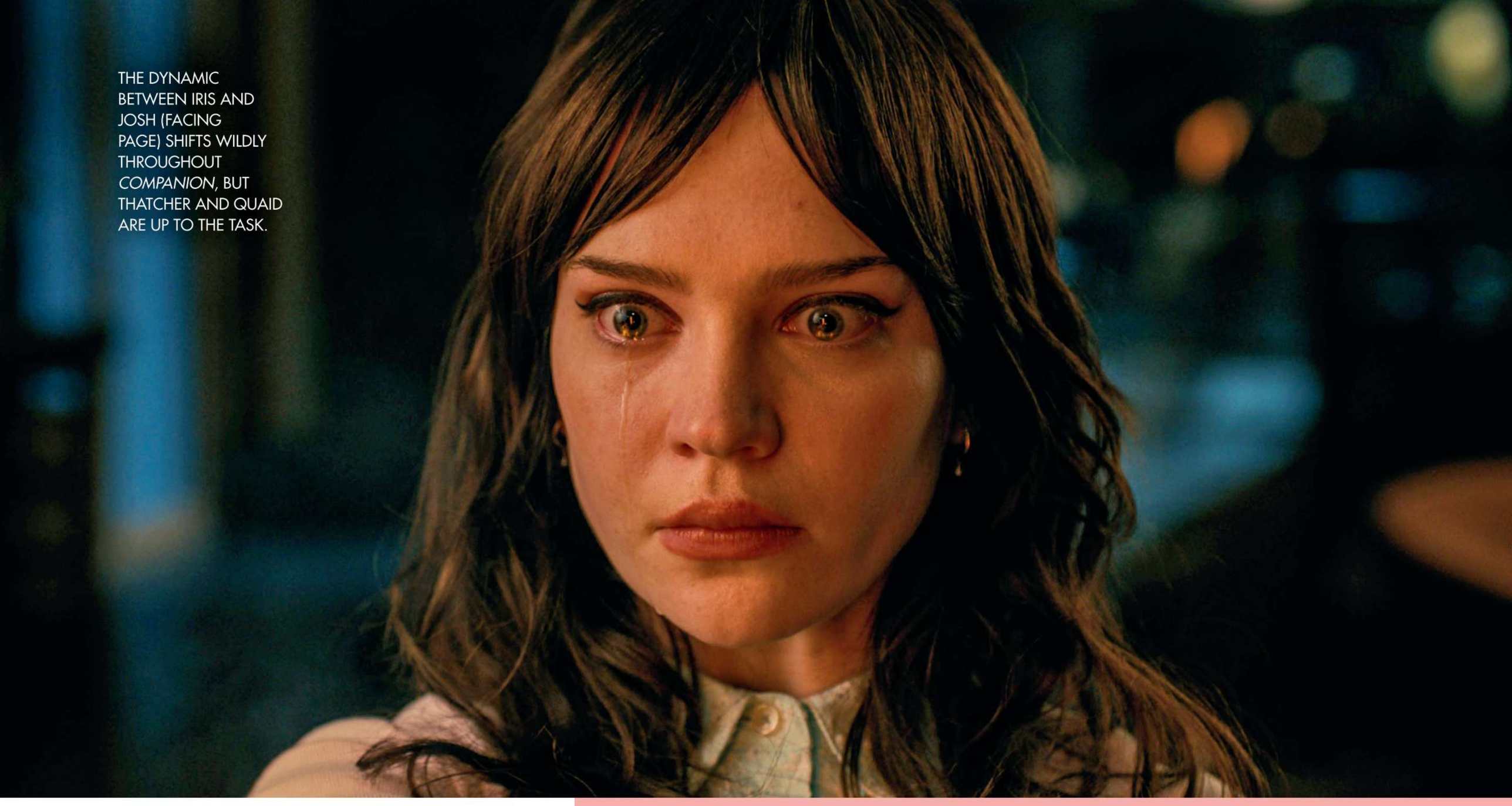
What *can* we tell you about *Companion*? The darkly comic film finds the newly-in-love Iris (Sophie Thatcher) accompanying her adoring boyfriend Josh (Jack Quaid) to a weekend getaway with friends Eli (Harvey Guillén) and Patrick (Lukas Gage), hosted in a luxurious lake house by Kat (Megan Suri) and her mysteriously wealthy Russian sugar daddy Sergey (Rupert Friend). But it soon becomes clear – and is obvious in the film's trailer – that the gathering's true agenda has been hidden from Iris, and as the weekend gets darker and much, much bloodier, it will reveal secrets she (and, hopefully, the audience) couldn't have guessed in their wildest imaginations.

No, the imagination to whom this layered and unexpected story belongs is that of Drew Hancock, the writer/director of *Companion*. Though it's Hancock's first feature, the filmmaker has been toiling in the industry for years, on everything from the proto-viral sketch series *Yacht Rock* (as an actor) to *Fred: The Show* (as a writer) to Tenacious D music videos (as a director). Not exactly the soil we're used to tilling for our next great voice in horror, Hancock admits.

"My IMDb is kind of a mess. That's a product of me thinking you take a paycheck where you can get it, but also wanting to learn as much as I can and saying yes to every possible genre, tone, whatever," he says. "'Yes, I would love to write for a Nickelodeon Villain of the Week show.' Or 'I want to write for a really fucked up Adult Swim animated show.' I wanted to learn, learn learn."

But after years of success as a creative for hire, Hancock faced a crisis. "It took the pandemic for me to sit down and say, 'Oh shit, I'm so far off from the kind of movies that make my heart beat really fast and make my brain tingle. I'm not getting opportunities to write those. Why is that?' And there was a come to Jesus moment, realizing it's my own fault. I don't have a writing sample that represents the kinds of movies that

LOOKS PAINFUL, BUT IRIS' TRIAL BY FIRE IS JUST GETTING STARTED.



THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN IRIS AND JOSH (FACING PAGE) SHIFTS WILDLY THROUGHOUT *COMPANION*, BUT THATCHER AND QUAID ARE UP TO THE TASK.

I want to make. And that's where *Companion* was born."

Envisioned merely as a spec script that represented his sensibilities, Hancock is as gobsmacked as anyone to be sitting on the other side of the experience, promoting *Companion* in FANGORIA. He credits the serendipity of getting the film made to finding the right partners right out of the gate.

"I knew [*Barbarian* producer] J.D. Lifshitz from BoulderLight. The day I finished writing *Companion* – it wasn't the first draft, it was like five terrible drafts and then two not-so-terrible drafts and then one good draft – I sent it to J.D. Within 24 hours he said, 'We love this script, we want to make this script if you want to make it with us.' Then he called Roy Lee [*It, Strange Darling*] of Vertigo and he was in. So, within 48 hours I had BoulderLight and Vertigo. They sent it to Zach Cregger, who came on board."

It's easy to see why the *Barbarian* producing team bit; *Companion* is not dissimilar from Cregger's 2022 favorite in the way it rounds a few narratively fearless pivots, pulling the rug out from under viewers in a high-wire act that somehow never falters. "Sometimes you forget as a writer that you can really do whatever you want; there are no wrong answers," Hancock says. "And if it's exciting to you, it'll probably be exciting to an audience. So that is how

> *"I have enough tricks up my sleeve with this script that if it was spoiled, there would still be enough twists amd turns that would satisfy audiences."*
>
> *– Drew Hancock*

JOSH AND IRIS IN HAPPIER TIMES (WHICH, IN THIS CASE, IS LIKE TEN HOURS BEFORE ALL THESE OTHER PICS).

"Go in as blind as you possibly can. I promise you it's worth it."

– Jack Quaid

I try to write. 'Okay, I painted myself in a corner, how do I get out of it?'"

Companion's audacious plotting is precisely what makes it so special, and starts with a voiceover from Iris explaining that the two days she felt most alive were the day she met Josh… and the day she killed him. (Don't panic, spoilerphobes: this voiceover occurs before the title screen.) It's a canny move by the filmmaker, who worried the script's first 20 pages – crucial character setup – were lacking in visceral action. "It's a lot of shoe leather. A Russian oligarch that looks like a cartoon gangster. A gay couple that checks all the boxes for this kind of movie. An icy female friend of the boyfriend. It all gets turned on its head," Hancock promises, "but the first two pages where Iris says, '…the day I killed him,' was just me going, 'Please read past page 10 because shit's going to get fucked up at a certain point. There will be death. There will be blood. Trust me.'"

With the project greenlit, Hancock set about casting. "I thought, 'It's going to be really tough to find a Josh; it's going to be really easy to find an Iris.' And I couldn't have been more wrong."

Says Quaid, "I was like, 'This is awesome. I have to be in this. This is the coolest thing I've ever read.'" The *Scream* (2022) and *The Boys* actor was excited to flesh out in Josh what could easily have been a two-dimensional character. "Something I've been trying with my characters lately is if I can distill them to a sentence or two to make it really simple, and then to extrapolate from there," Quaid shares. "What I landed on was that Josh is a person who's never been told the words, 'I love you.' What does that do to a person, and what does that drive them to do? And in the world of this movie, it drives him to do a very specific thing, but I think it all comes

PATRICK (LUKAS GAGE) KEEPS HIS COOL WHILE IRIS, WELL, DOESN'T.

from a severe lack of connection. I don't think he's ever really felt loved by anybody but Iris."

Iris was a trickier prospect in many ways, going back to the script. "My first instinct was to make her the villain," Hancock says. "And I was going down that road a little bit. But as soon as I was putting her in that location and I was putting her with all these people that she didn't know and was feeling alienated by, I was relating to her so much. I forgot who said this but as a writer, the way to relate to characters is to follow the pain. And the pain Iris is feeling outside of that house – about to step in to meet these people she doesn't know – her worst fear is that none of them will treat her like a human being."

As universal a fear as that may be, Iris' eventual journey is somewhat… unprecedented. Hancock explains, "The character is twofold. The first half, you have to believe her as a shrinking violet, as someone that's not capable of standing up to anyone, and there are so many actresses that could do *that*. And then, the second half, you had to buy her as a badass, as someone who would look like an action star. And there are so many actresses that can do *that*." Finding someone who could do both, Hancock explains, was the tricky part. Then came Sophie Thatcher. "We did a chemistry read with Sophie Thatcher and Jack Quaid, pretty close to shooting. We did it on location. Within the first five seconds I was like, 'This is Iris.' My heart was beating and I was like, 'We have to have her. She's perfect.'"

Thatcher might've been perfect, but she doesn't shrink from calling *Companion* "definitely the hardest thing I've ever done in my life." A bold statement from someone who's been living in the woods for three seasons of *Yellowjackets*. But *Companion*, Thatcher says, hit different. "I feel like I'm in a lot of films where it feels like the highest stakes. But this time it truly was the highest of stakes because of where it takes my character," she says. "And I seem to always be fighting for my life in my roles, but this just seems to be more psychologically complex and so much harder to grasp, because I couldn't relate to it in any way. It was just about finding ways of grounding it."

Creating empathetic, grounded portrayals within horror (most recently in *Heretic*) has become the young performer's trademark. But her takeaway from *Companion* is that she'd like to explore more work beyond the genre. "Everything I do is really heavy," Thatcher points out. "You get a full character arc and it's very satisfying. But I want to act in something where I'm not always victimized. Maybe not covered in blood," she laughs. "I've joked about it before, but it's like a serious kind of joke. My agents have said, 'next time, no blood!'"

Surprisingly, her blood-covered moments (of which there are many) in *Companion* aren't the ones that left a mark on the actress. "The most vulnerable parts were being so enamored with Josh. And feeling his dislike towards me, when I'm so enamored, was the most crushing feeling. Watching the movie, I thought, 'Oh, I feel embarrassed for myself.' Then the turn felt so much more satisfying, and was coming from something that actually really hurt."

Quaid hopes viewers will walk out of *Companion* asking themselves how they might fare ethically in certain situations. "If this world were to ever be any closer to ours, these are questions we'd have to ask ourselves," he says. "But I think Sophie does such a good job in making you care about Iris, that you empathize with her. And you know [Josh] is a piece of shit," he laughs. "My character has to lack some degree of empathy to do what he does in this movie."

Back to those spoilers we've been avoiding. How do the stars and director really feel about them? "I'm not a precious person," says Hancock. "I have enough tricks up my sleeve with this script that if it was spoiled, there would still be enough twists and turns that would satisfy audiences." Thatcher is more pragmatic: "There's a lot of anxiety out there about it, but having watched this movie for the first time, and knowing the twists, it was still so effective. And I think that says a lot about the writing."

Quaid, alas, doubles down. "I think it's one of the best scripts I've ever read. I've never had this experience before, where I'm reading a script and I'm alone in a room, and I audibly say, '*What?!*' And I want people to watch this movie the way that I read the script, with every reveal hitting them in exactly the right order."

We'll do what we can, Jack. *Companion* opens on January 31st.

CAN YOU BLAME HER? HONESTLY.

FINDING THE BOUT

THE AUTHORS.

JOSH ETHIER, ACE &
BRETT W. BACHMAN, ACE

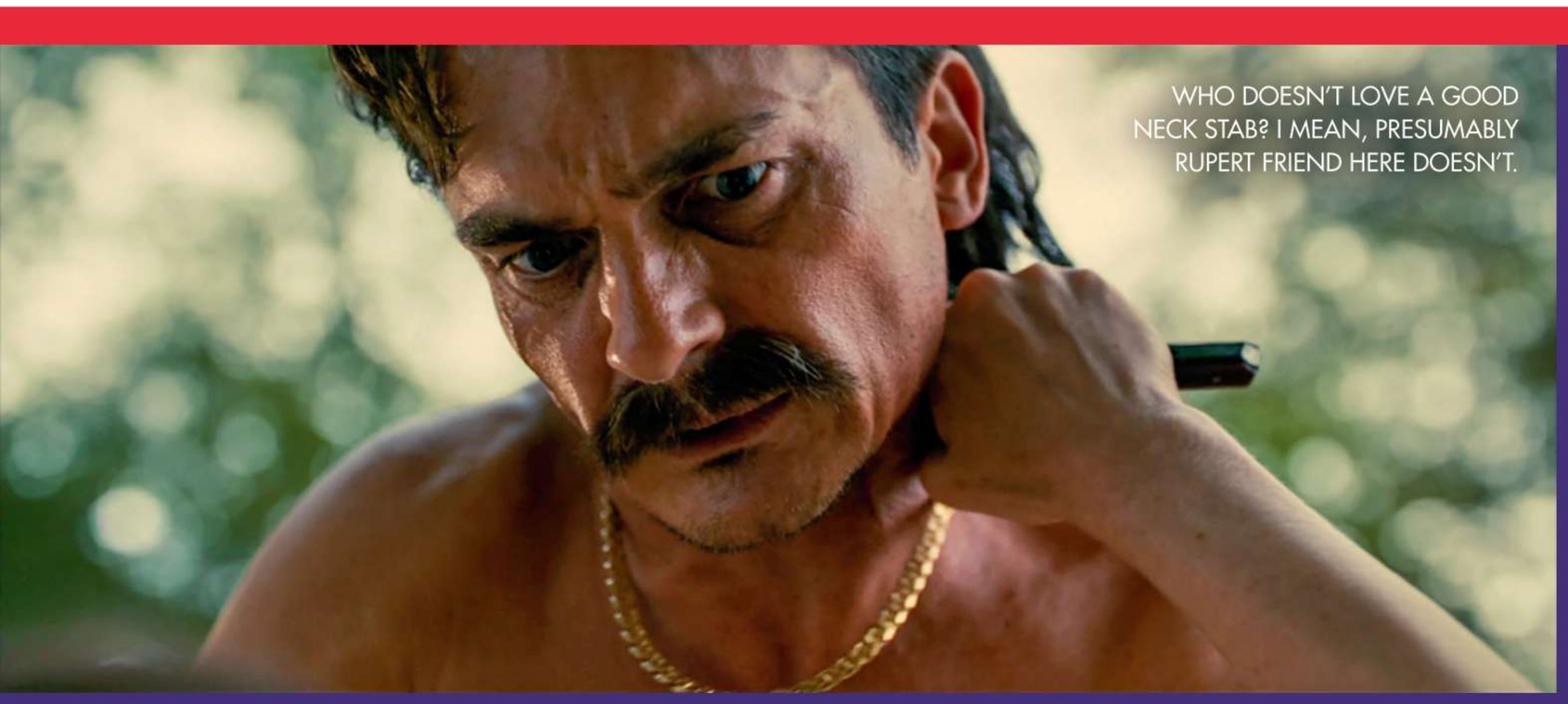
TWO RENOWNED GENRE-FILM EDITORS TEAMED UP ON DREW HANCOCK'S *COMPANION*, AND WE'RE HONORED TO SHARE THEIR CONVERSATION ABOUT THE COLLABORATION HERE.

By the time Brett Bachman and I met at a mutual director friend's Halloween party, we were already big fans of each other's work. Over the next few years we became good friends, two editors working their way up to bigger budgets and wider releases. In early 2024, Brett and his wife were expecting twins, and he asked if I'd be willing to step in for him on his latest film, titled *Companion*. It would mark the second time both of us had worked with the team at BoulderLight Pictures (Brett previously cut *The Vigil*, and I edited their first film, *Contracted*, a decade prior). The resulting edit is a beautiful mashup of our skill sets and hopefully not the last time we get to cut together. This conversation took place after the film was finished. – Josh Ethier

JOSH ETHIER, ACE: Let's start with how you came onboard *Companion*.

BRETT W. BACHMAN, ACE: *Companion* came to me through [producer] Rafi [Margules] over at BoulderLight. I read the script and had a meeting with [director] Drew [Hancock] a few days later. The script was very funny. Playful, full of tonal switches. Although there are elements of science fiction in the story, it was a story of emancipation, with Iris [Sophie Thatcher] breaking out of a toxic relationship and discovering her own identity.

JE: Was the version of the script you read the shooting draft, or were there further revisions?



WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD NECK STAB? I MEAN, PRESUMABLY RUPERT FRIEND HERE DOESN'T.

BB: Basically the shooting draft. I start seeing footage and by day two I realize, 'This movie is far funnier than I expected it to be.' Unfortunately, after a few weeks the shoot was shut down because of the strikes, but we had a decent amount assembled by then. That initial assembly had a more sinister tone with darker music.

JE: When you paused for the strikes, there was basically one half of the movie that hadn't been shot, right?

BB: It was basically the second half that hadn't been shot. If you ask anybody that's worked on a rough cut, they'll tell you that you can't have any kind of informed opinion about the movie without sitting down and watching the entire thing. You need to have that first cut.

JE: The first complete thought.

BB: Exactly. So there was no sense in continuing the edit at that stage, which was a heartbreaker, because you could sit down and watch forty-five minutes of a movie and it had a lot of promise. Months go by and it's getting toward the end of the year and I get a phone call from Rafi saying that they're getting back up and running and asking if I'm available. I tell him, 'Yes, I'm coming back. One stipulation, my wife and I are having twins in a few months.' So I have to say goodbye for the middle of the director's cut, I'll be gone for six weeks and then I can come back. Everyone was totally fine with that, we just had to figure out how to handle it.

JE: Getting everything back up and running must've been a Herculean task.

BB: Before shooting started up again Drew and I had a conversation about leaning into a lighter tone, embracing the comedy, being more playful with the edit. The only difference in the shoot was that we had started shooting in the summer and then we resumed filming in December. All these actors are in summer outfits in 40-degree temperatures, pretending it's a summer evening in New York. We had to add leaves on the trees because they'd all fallen off. Once filming completed we watched our first cut, which was already pretty tight, and we started playing with music. Bringing in strings and woodwinds, countering some of the darkness on screen. We worked to center the POV of the audience into Iris' experience and the film began to take on an entirely different visual and sonic language. We're getting music selects from [music supervisor] Rob [Lowry], and we're starting to hear early demos from [composer] Hrishikesh [Hirway]. Which is right at the point my paternity leave is scheduled to start, and I pass the baton off to you.

JE: At that point the film had shifted to being something more fun and kitschy, almost like '90s Wes Anderson in a way. The only darkness left in the movie was the third act, when things take a turn into much more serious territory. Our characters are finally having those conversations about abuse and manipulation. As Drew and I worked through the movie, him getting used to a new editor and me getting used to a new project, neither of us knew exactly what to do with that section. We just had a note card that basically said, 'Fresh approach needed.'

That playfulness had been so beautifully expressed the entire rest of the movie that finally I said, 'Why are we getting away from what Brett and Drew have been doing so well this entire time?' I pulled up that same bin that Rob had sent us of all these great music selects and I found this song from The Turtles, 'You Showed Me,' and cut with that instead of the dark thriller music that was there prior. The whole section roared to life. Even though the story was now more violent and thrilling, it still felt like you were watching the same movie. We needed it to have this almost mixtape quality for this young girl in her early 20s. It was a perfect pairing with the music Hrishikesh was writing that sounded like Jon Brion back when he did *Punch-Drunk Love*.

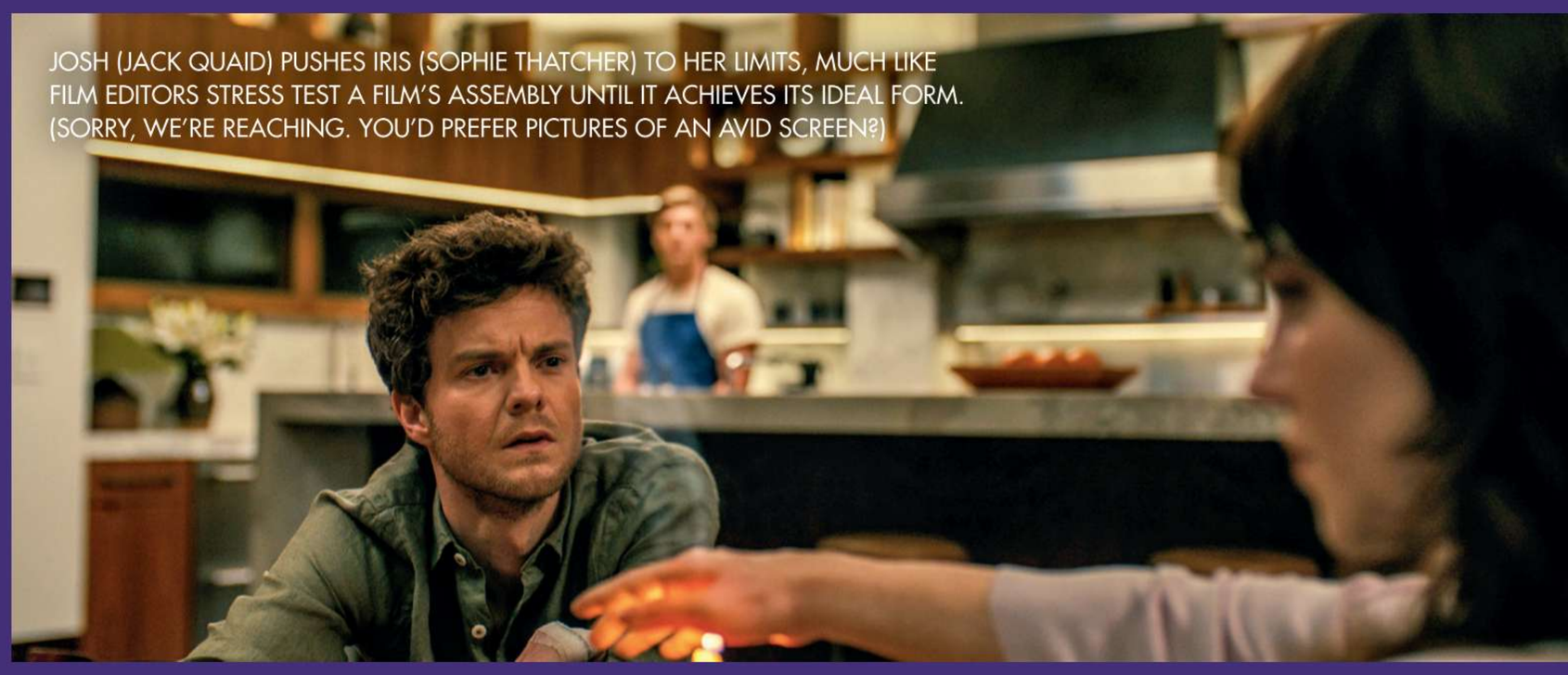
BB: It's a cliché, but there's the movie you write, the movie you shoot, and the movie you edit. The thing that always intimidates me every single time I start a project, and I'm sure you can relate to this as well, there's that point where you have that first full cut and you realize you haven't found the movie. The movie's not there yet. That's not to fault the script, which was very strong. Every movie has a first pass that has some sort of issue. Pace, tone, the raw elements need to be further distilled.

SOMEONE *REALLY* WANTS OUT OF THAT CAR.

PHOTOS BY HERNAN CAZARES • COMPANION PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

JE: It becomes so much more real when you show people and suddenly there are parts of your brain that are firing that weren't firing previously. Your mindset during production is, 'I want to make sure we have everything we need. I want to support this director and this creative team in any way that I can.' So then when you're in the director's cut and you start showing it to people, that's the first time that the visage breaks. Suddenly you're saying, 'Oh yeah, that is a bit of a confusing beat there,' or 'Yeah, I guess we are spending too long in the woods in the second act.' It's so different, because other departments aren't really given room to fail. When you're on set, you need to make your day. Editorial is really the only time where you can be wrong for weeks and then just be right for an afternoon, and the movie's incredible.

BB: If you don't have a cut that falls flat on its face I don't think you're doing the job right. Editing requires you to be experimental and take risks. You have all this material that gets shot and you're sifting through dozens if not hundreds of hours of material, and not only do you have to take that footage and arrange it in the most efficient way, but then you have to factor in all of these other departments that are important to the final film. Music, sound design, visual effects. The most important thing that we do as editors is address, 'How does this movie work in time.' How do you track the audience emotionally but stay ahead of them so you can guide them efficiently?



JOSH (JACK QUAID) PUSHES IRIS (SOPHIE THATCHER) TO HER LIMITS, MUCH LIKE FILM EDITORS STRESS TEST A FILM'S ASSEMBLY UNTIL IT ACHIEVES ITS IDEAL FORM. (SORRY, WE'RE REACHING. YOU'D PREFER PICTURES OF AN AVID SCREEN?)

PICTURED: EDITOR JOSH ETHIER, ACE (*BLISS*, *GRETEL & HANSEL*, *ORPHAN: FIRST KILL*, AND *DON'T MOVE*).

JE: I feel like I've fallen flat on my face emotionally with every first cut I've ever watched with somebody else in the room. Suddenly your heart is in your throat, and you realize 'Oh, this isn't landing how I wanted it to.' You have to arrive at the point where you feel confident enough to show it to people and let it break in front of you, and then you can have an open conversation about it. I think the popular misconception is that editing is assembling, putting things together in the right way. Editing is all about re-editing. It's about putting something together and going, 'That's fine, but it could be better.' What are the beats we need to underline? What's the latest we can get in and the quickest we can get out? What's the emotional core of this scene? I know Jack Quaid is looking for a book in this scene but what's he really trying to find? An answer to a question. Okay, cool. So that's the driving force there.

BB: Editing is also omitting. It's asking, 'When would the movie be better by taking something away?' or 'When is the question more important than the explanation?'

JE: Editorial is an ongoing conversation that a group of people are having. When I joined the film I had this glorious week where I just got to watch you cut, but I was on the couch sitting with the director. Having those large scope story conversations while you were opening bins, bringing in sound effects, listening to new pieces of music. What made *Companion* so fun was that although we have similar

COMING FROM THE PRODUCERS OF *BARBARIAN*, WE CAN BE ASSURED THAT *COMPANION* HAS PLENTY OF TWISTS.

PICTURED: EDITOR BRETT W. BACHMAN, ACE (*MANDY*, *PIG*, *THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER*, AND THE UPCOMING *HEART EYES*).

skill sets and tastes, we have totally different methods. It's incredible to watch another editor cut and to be a part of that. I think everyone should get a chance to do it. It really gave me clarity on what we do for a living while also allowing me to spend time with a colleague I have deep respect for.

BB: What other job would you be rewarded for failing nine times out of ten? If it takes ten weeks to get there and an audience responds to it, then you've done your job right. What is that Thomas Edison quote? 'I didn't fail a thousand times trying to invent the light bulb. The lightbulb was an invention with a thousand steps.' I think the same could be said about editing. I remember on *Companion* trying Christopher Cross on some flashbacks and they felt great. It's fun as hell, and you're convinced this is genius. So you move on to the next scene, and then you rewatch that Christopher Cross needle drop three days later, and it's...

JE: Just immediately, no.

BB: You want to turn away from the screen. You're like, 'I have to sit through this for 30 more seconds? It's so bad. Why did we think this was working?'

JE: There was a point where we were trying to land the final needle drop on *Companion*, and I won't give anything away but there was a piece of music in there that we liked a lot and we wanted to make sure that we loved it. So we tried a bunch of other approaches, musically. I remember I texted Drew one morning and said, 'I found the perfect song.' He said, 'Great, let's watch as soon as I get in.' Just as a gag, I had [assistant editor] Noah [Cody] pull Smash Mouth's 'All Star' into the Avid. Drew's a great guy, he has a great sense of humor. It's one of my favorite qualities about him. He was just so open from the start with me. Now, bear in mind that I did have another track cut in that was actually working really great, but the first one I was going to show him was 'All Star.'

BB: I never heard about this!

JE: So he comes into the office, I hit play, there's about thirty seconds of lead-up and then that first line of the song hits and we both start laughing. I turned in my chair to hit the spacebar to stop it, and he said, 'No, let it play.' So we watched the entire end of the movie with Smash Mouth over it. At the end, I turn to him and he's smiling. 'It actually lines up with a few beats.' He absolutely gave 'All Star' its day in court. We stress tested different songs and cuts for weeks, and it all strengthened the ending that's there, which I think is perfectly suited to the film.

BB: I don't need to look at any more red convertibles.

JE: [*laughs*] Same, dude. 💀

OK, SO NOW SOPHIE'S GOT THE GUN. SEE, TWISTS!

KILLING IT

20 BEST DEATHS IN 24'S HORROR

By Matt Donato

As we wrap another year with no shortage of gory gratification, let's toast those horror creators and effects crafters who engage in the grandest spectacle of on-screen kills. It's been another banner year for iconic horror franchises furthering their legacies, but don't count out some bloodthirsty indie underdogs. Scalp-hungry laundry machines, yuppie yogi disembowelment, chainsaw genital mutilation (rad band name), the works. They all deserve their special highlight here in the pages of FANGORIA.

10 "Sky Die-ve" • *V/H/S/Beyond*

Justin Martinez and *V/H/S*' producers are insane for pulling off "Live and Let Dive." Zach, a skydiving 30th birthday boy, barely gets his parachute open before landing in an orange grove after an alien attack destroys the excursion's airplane. There's no help from his fastened-tight best friend, the sky-jumping veteran of the duo. We see what Zach sees via a GoPro-like helmet view, including as Zach looks to check why his friend's been so quiet. Turns out Zach's buddy was decapitated while plummeting, as the camera pans from his severed spinal stump up to his head tangled in the chute strings. It's a comically graphic visual with blood slathered on the lines leading up to a cadaver's petrified expression, as gross as it is morbidly entertaining.

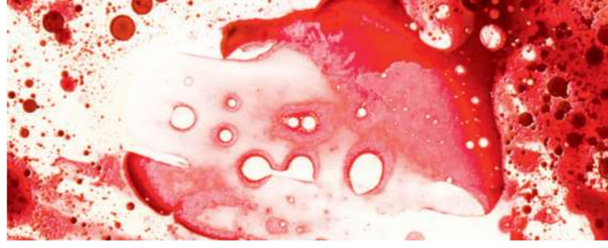
9 "A Harrowing History Lesson" • *The Devil's Bath*

I try to have fun with these selections, but Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala's *The Devil's Bath* is sickeningly severe. Through Anja Plaschg's Agnes, the film confronts 18th-century "suicide by proxy" practices. Depressed individuals (predominantly women) would commit unforgivable crimes to meet religious executions, (hopefully) securing eternal salvation through confessions. It's hard enough watching Agnes slaughter a child only to be absolved of sin. Then she's beheaded, cueing merry folk music as townsfolk clamor to sip her neck stump's fountaining blood (some thought drinking the blood of executed prisoners would ward off melancholy). The cinematic experience is a historical gut punch, but the demise itself is a cruel punctuation mark.

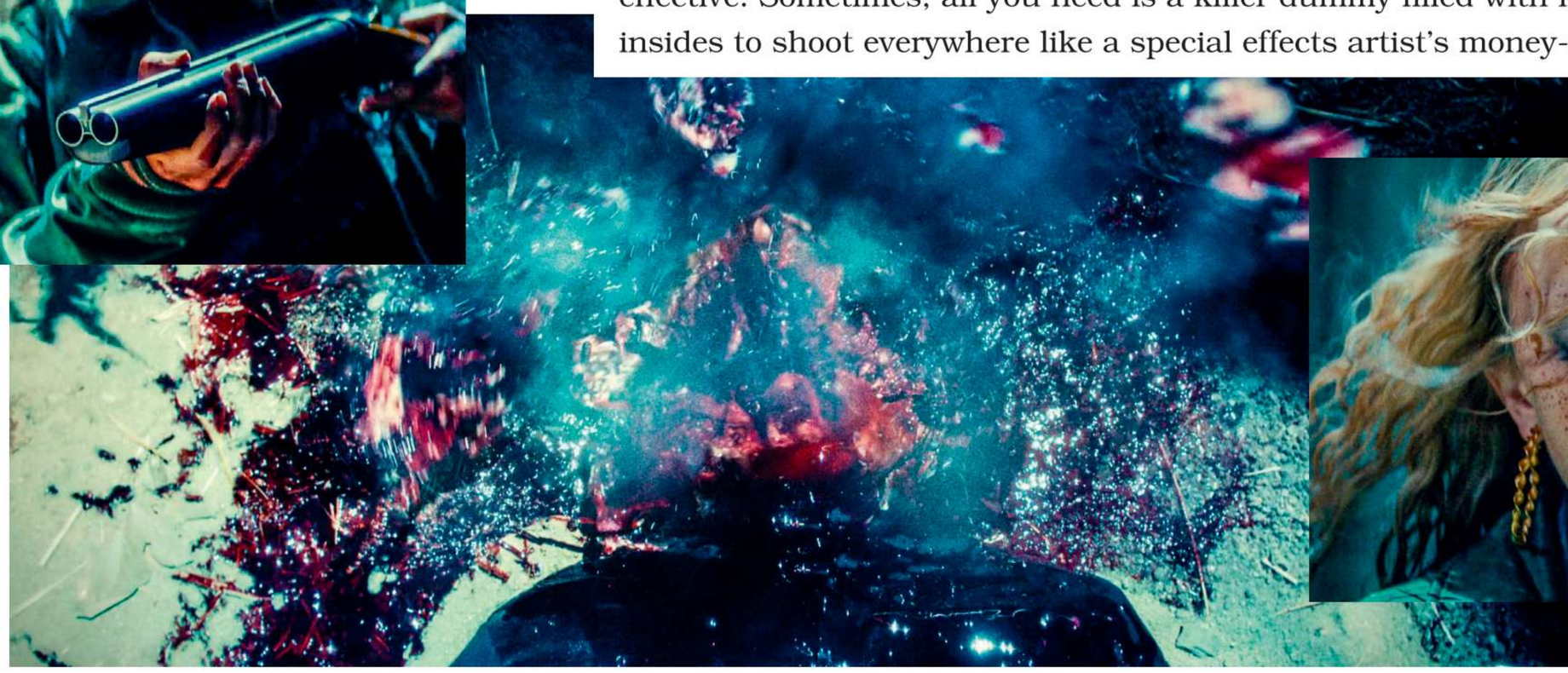
PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF A24, NETFLIX, AND UNIVERSAL PICTURES

8 "Shotgun Beats Head" • MaXXXine



Divine intervention, baby. Mia Goth's Maxine Minx tells her pious daddy, "You gave me just what I needed," then lowers the sawed-off shotgun toward his head. Maxine pulls the trigger, and Ernest's face is rearranged into the blown-apart resemblance of a Demogorgon from *Stranger Things*. Simple, yet repulsively effective. Sometimes, all you need is a killer dummy filled with icky, slimy insides to shoot everywhere like a special effects artist's money-shot. Praise be.



7 "Sometimes Getting Stuck In The Washer Isn't Sexy" • Grave Torture

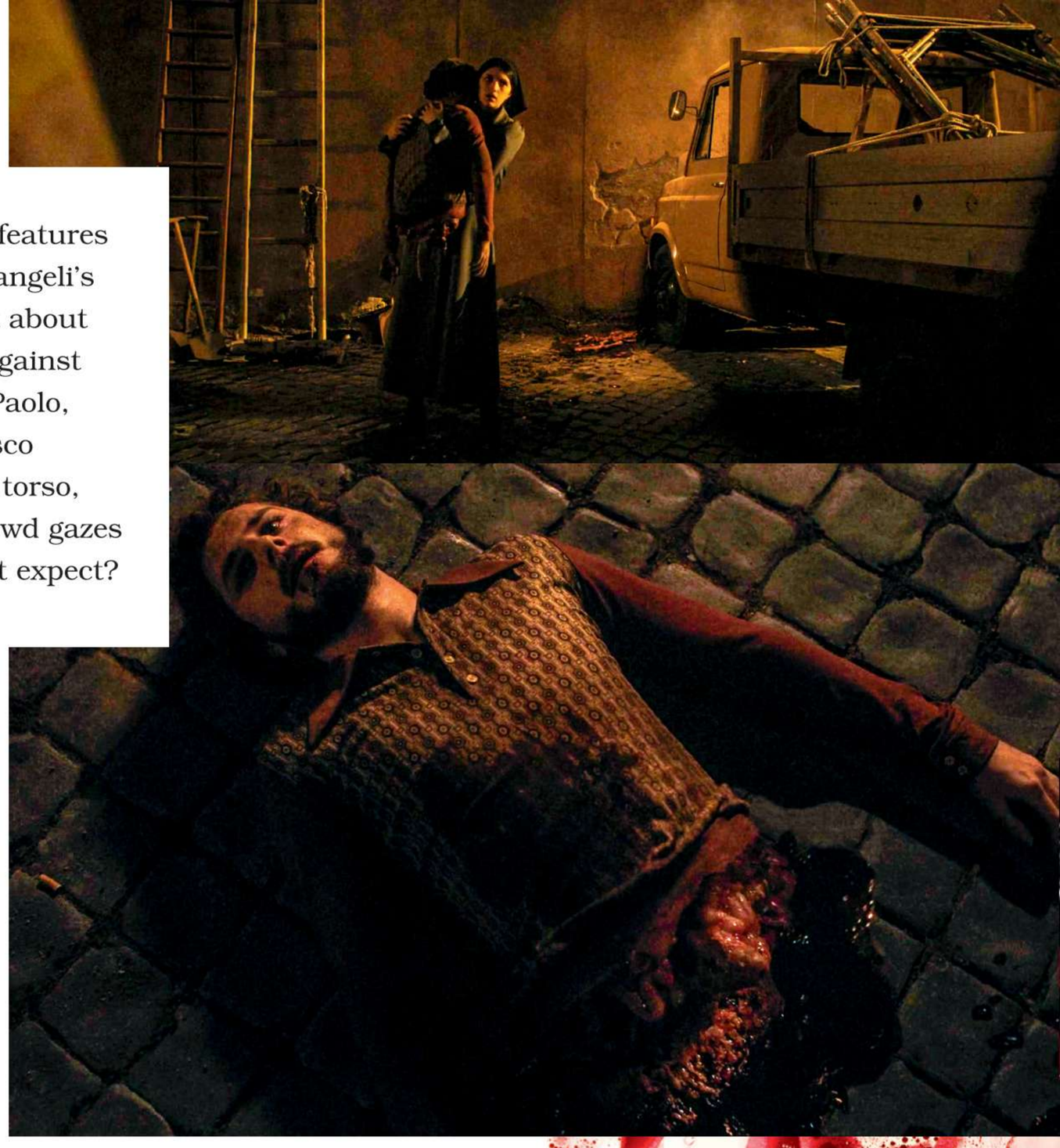
This isn't the first time a horror character's been scalped, and it won't be the last. But by a washing machine? Joko Anwar sends an elderly nursing home patient into the laundry room, where she climbs halfway into the washer. In an attempt to back out, her hand hits the green start button, initiating a spin cycle. Her hair tangles in the twirling bin, turning the woman into a corkscrew. Finally, the machine stops, and she pulls herself far enough out of the chamber so we can see her horrified expression and taut braid, but just like the boat propeller in *Piranha* (2010), one final motion tears her hair, scalp, and face skin mask off to reveal red-meat tissue atop a skeleton's shocked expression.

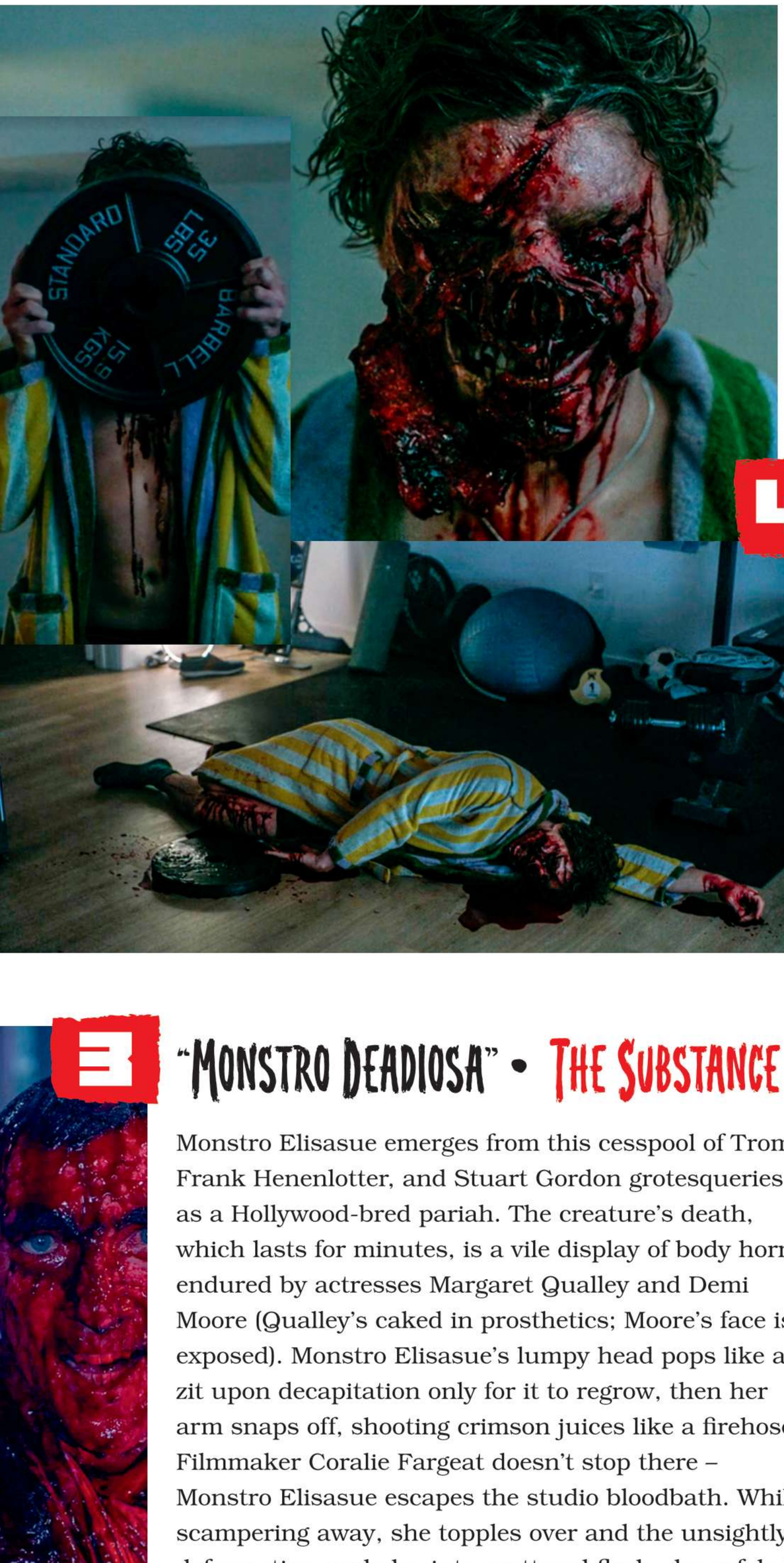
6 "Pop Goes The Vampire Cop" • Abigail

Radio Silence loves popping characters like water balloons (ie: *Ready or Not*). *Abigail* explodes its vampires when they croak, none better than Dan Stevens' Frank. He's defeated by a traditional stake to the heart, but his eruption is epic. Before Frank can utter "Fuck," his body splatters like a blood-filled grenade. The blast throws back Melissa Barrera and Alisha Weir as goopy, mucusy liquids coat a massive radius in bodily carnage. It's chunky, tainted black, and exceptionally gross.

5 "Half A Man" • The First Omen

The First Omen isn't an incredibly gory prequel, but it features one of my favorite deaths of the year. Poor Andrea Arcangeli's Paolo tries to warn Nell Tiger Free's novitiate Margaret about the church's demonic heresy, but a vehicle pins him against a building wall. Margaret frantically attempts to help Paolo, pulling him "free," even though it's only half her ex-disco partner. Margaret stands there holding Paolo's lifeless torso, intestines dangling like streamers, as the gathered crowd gazes on in terror. It's so gruesomely silly; what did Margaret expect?





4 "Plate Face" • Smile 2

What a shame: Lukas Gage has a perfect smile. Maybe that's why the "Smiler," "The Monstrosity," or whatever you call it, forces Gage's jumpy drug dealer to bash his pretty boy face into a disfigured pulp. Lewis Fregoli starts hammering his facial attributes broken and mushy with a weight plate, escalating damages with each hit. The camera holds steady as each harmful slam breaks more bones, splits more wounds, and transforms Lewis into a mortuary model. A collaboration of practical, puppeteering and VFX erases Gage's handsome features with bloody-raw contusions and exposed skull surfaces. It's violence that's worthy of the main stage.

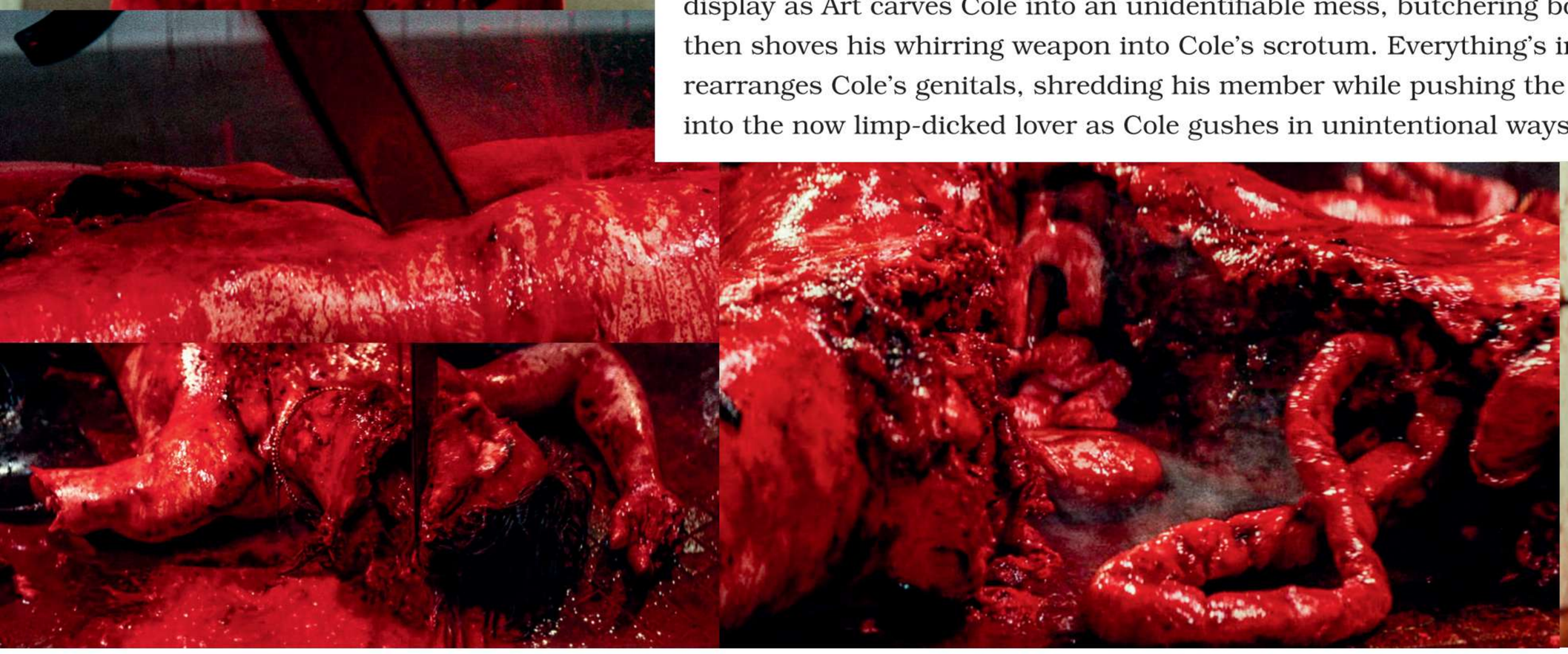
PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND MUBI

3 "Monstro Deadiosa" • The Substance

Monstro Elisasue emerges from this cesspool of Troma, Frank Henenlotter, and Stuart Gordon grotesqueries as a Hollywood-bred pariah. The creature's death, which lasts for minutes, is a vile display of body horror endured by actresses Margaret Qualley and Demi Moore (Qualley's caked in prosthetics; Moore's face is exposed). Monstro Elisasue's lumpy head pops like a zit upon decapitation only for it to regrow, then her arm snaps off, shooting crimson juices like a firehose. Filmmaker Coralie Fargeat doesn't stop there – Monstro Elisasue escapes the studio bloodbath. While scampering away, she topples over and the unsightly deformation explodes into scattered flesh, dress fabric, and nauseating viscera. Out slithers Moore's detached face, the last slice of Elisabeth Sparkle, which melts into her cracked Walk of Fame star.

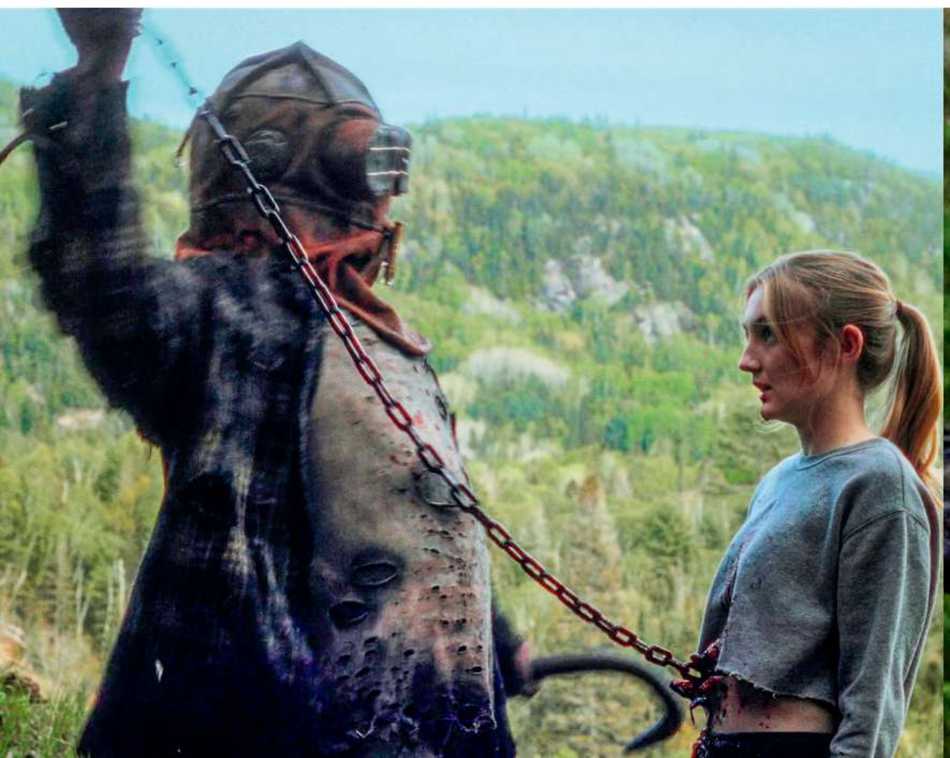
2 "Seasons Bleedings" • Terrifier 3

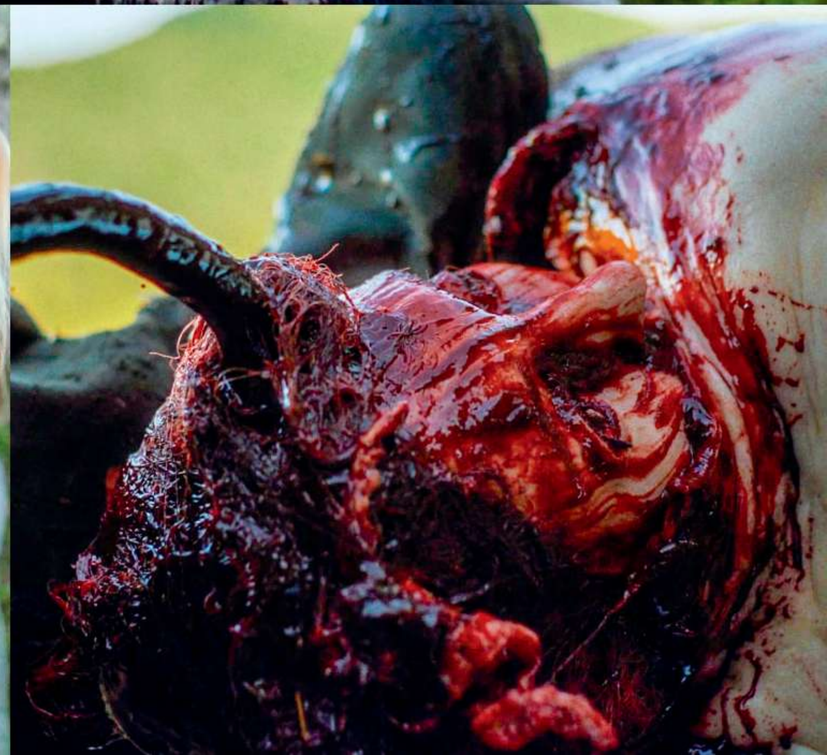
Terrifier 3 offers a full-monty glimpse of penile mutilation as an olive branch for its countless mutilated women. Mason Mecartea's Cole thinks he's getting lucky in a university shower, but instead meets the business end of Art's chainsaw between his legs. Damien Leone's outstanding practical effects pedigree translates into a shocking display as Art carves Cole into an unidentifiable mess, butchering body parts – and then shoves his whirring weapon into Cole's scrotum. Everything's in view as Art rearranges Cole's genitals, shredding his member while pushing the chainsaw deeper into the now limp-dicked lover as Cole gushes in unintentional ways.



1 "Inward Facing Gut Rearrangement" • In A Violent Nature

Sorry Art, here's Johnny! Chris Nash's lumbering *In A Violent Nature* villain interrupts yogi Aurora mid-pose and pretzels her body. First, Johnny punches an antique dragging hook through Aurora's abdomen from behind. He pulls the protruding hook-and-chain through and pierces her skull with the sharpened point. Johnny, still other-handing the opposite hook, yanks on the chain until Aurora's head is squeezed through her gaping stomach wound. Nash shows the girl's spine snapping as she's turned into a lowercase "p;" Aurora's noggin pushes organ chunks to the ground as it passes through her midsection. Art would cackle with glee should this be a *Terrifier* movie, but Johnny's silent brutality makes the kill much more unsettling.





Unearthing Orlok

Robert Eggers' Path To Nosferatu

The filmmaker behind *The Witch*, *The Lighthouse* and *The Northman* realizes a long-held dream with his new film.

By Michael Gingold

You could say that *Nosferatu* has been in Robert Eggers' blood since he was a child. The filmmaker, whose new take on the 1922 landmark vampire film is a Christmas treat for horror fans this year, figures he first saw F.W. Murnau's silent original when he was 9, on VHS. And just as some fans have said that early viewings of *Night of the Living Dead* on cheap cassettes only added to its rough documentary veneer, Eggers believes that seeing *Nosferatu* in less-than-pristine condition at that formative age helped contribute to its mystique.

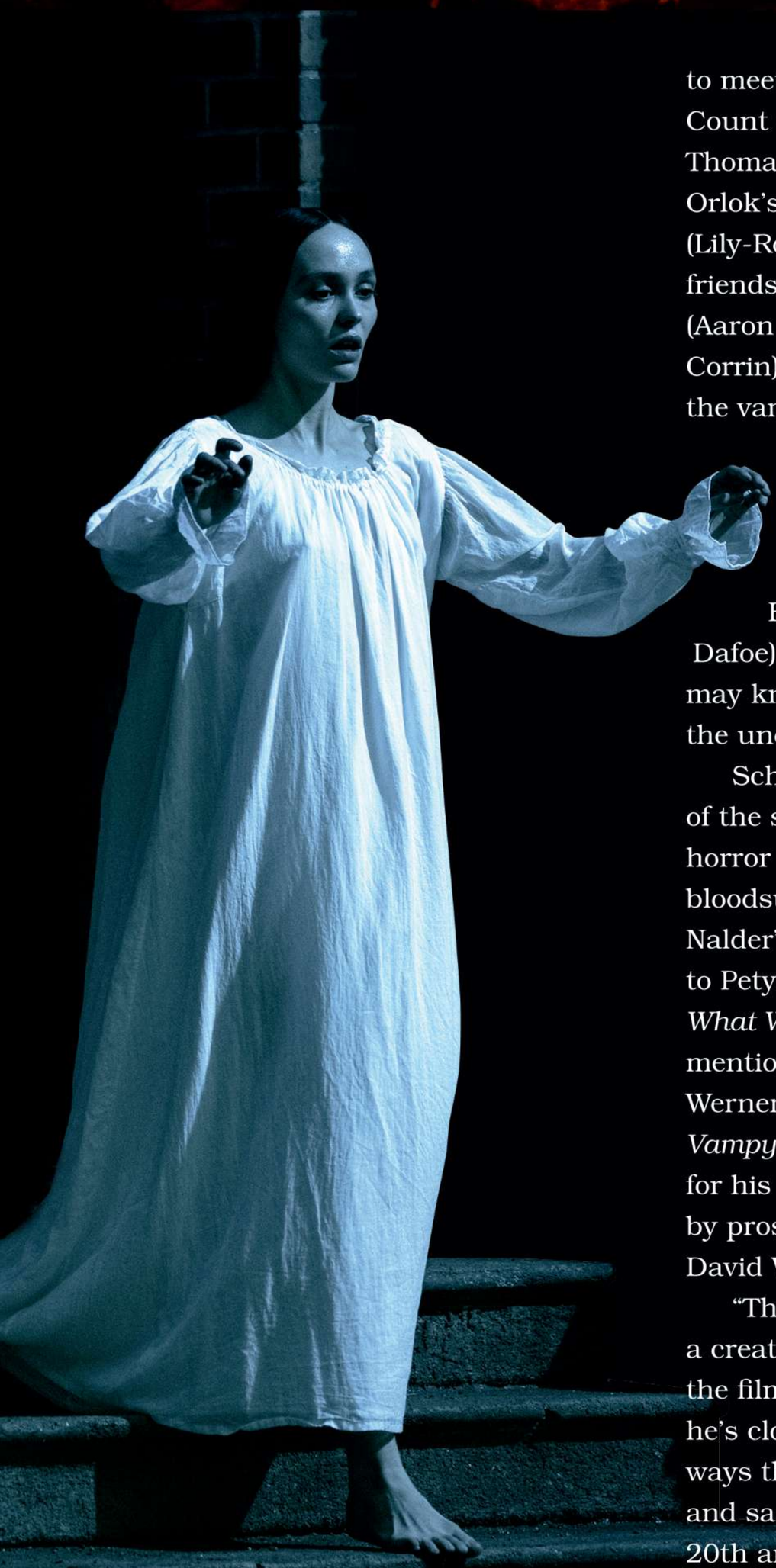
"While I really enjoyed the beautiful restorations where you can see Murnau's intentions," he explains, "the VHS I had as a kid was made from a bad 16mm print, and had a lot of extra atmosphere as a result. You couldn't see [star] Max Schreck's bald cap and you couldn't see the greasepaint, and it was versions like that that helped created the legend that Schreck really was a vampire. And even though the acting style was very exaggerated, there was something about it that felt almost like found footage to me as a kid," he laughs.

"Then in high school, I did a play version of *Nosferatu* with my friend Ashley Kelly Tata, who's now a prominent theater and opera director. A local impresario saw that and invited me to stage a more professional version in his venue, and that's when I was certain that I wanted to direct. So this is a very important story and movie for me."

Eggers' film takes as its credited sources both Henrik Galeen's screenplay for Murnau's movie and Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* – of which the original *Nosferatu*, of course, was an unofficial adaptation. Set in the German Baltic coastal town of Wisborg in 1838, it begins with estate agent Thomas Hutter (Nicholas Hoult) departing for Transylvania

LILY-ROSE DEPP PLAYS ELLEN HUNTER, A WOMAN INCREASINGLY ENTHRALLED BY THE SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE.

THE INTRICATE SETS, CONSTRUCTED AT BARRANDOV STUDIOS IN PRAGUE, HELPED CREATE A FULLY-REALIZED WORLD FOR THE CAST.



DEPP'S ELLEN HUNTER IS AN EQUIVALENT TO MINA HARKER IN *DRACULA*.

to meet with a mysterious client, Count Orlok (Bill Skarsgård). While Thomas is discovering the horrors of Orlok's true nature, his new wife Ellen (Lily-Rose Depp), staying with their friends Friedrich and Anna Harding (Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Emma Corrin), has been having visions of the vampire that begin to possess her. Orlok soon arrives in Wisborg to claim Ellen, bringing a virulent plague with him, and only Dr. Albin Eberhart Von Franz (Willem Dafoe), the film's Van Helsing analog, may know how to rescue her from the undead fiend's thrall.

Schreck's bald, ratlike visage is one of the seminal creature concepts in horror history, having inspired screen bloodsuckers ranging from Reggie Nalder's Barlow in 1979's *Salem's Lot* to Petyr (Ben Fransham) in 2014's *What We Do in the Shadows* – not to mention Klaus Kinski in the title role of Werner Herzog's '79 film *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. Eggers' conception of Orlok for his *Nosferatu*, brought to the screen by prosthetic and makeup FX designer David White, changes things up a bit.

"The main thing is that Schreck is a creature, not a folkloric vampire," the filmmaker notes, "even though he's closer to a folk vampire in many ways than to the heroic and antiheroic and sad vampires we've seen in the 20th and 21st centuries. But I realized he basically just needed to be a dead human, so I thought, 'What would a dead Transylvanian nobleman look like?' He would be dressed in a 16th-century outfit, with all the correct hairstyles, etc.; we certainly make nods to Schreck with the shape of the skull and the fingernails and so forth, but that was the guiding principle."

The next key question became: who to play this creature of the night? The choice of Skarsgård might seem obvious now in the wake of his chilling turns as Pennywise in the *It* duo, but those were still in the future when the actor first encountered Eggers and discussed the project with him. This was way back, Skarsgård reveals, when Eggers had just completed his breakout debut movie *The Witch*.

"I really admired Robert," he says, "and the things he was into and his sensibilities really spoke to me. That led to me reading for Harding, which became Aaron Taylor-Johnson's part. I absolutely loved the script and was like, 'OK, I'll do whatever I can to be a part of this movie.' I adored the original *Nosferatu*, and this felt like such a rich and beautiful reimagining. And then I read for the Thomas Hutter role, and I booked that one, and then the movie fell apart. Then it almost came about again, and fell apart again. And several years later, Robert reached out to me about the possibility of playing Orlok. I never thought I would fill the shoes of Nosferatu going into it, but that's how things played out."

"Bill is a very versatile actor; he is able to channel darkness and has the

PHOTOS BY AIDAN MONAGHAN • COURTESY OF FOCUS FEATURES

THE DESIGN OF BILL SKARSGÅRD'S COUNT ORLOK WAS LESS TYPICAL VAMPIRE, MORE DEAD 16TH-CENTURY TRANSYLVANIAN NOBLEMAN.

rare gift of being able to transform," Eggers says. "So he gets those kinds of roles, but certainly in *Barbarian*, you see that he could have also played Hutter or Harding and pulled it off very well. I really wanted to work with Bill, and he was actually cast in [Eggers' 2022 period epic] *The Northman*, but because of COVID and other things, it didn't happen, even though he came to Belfast. There's footage of him in his Viking costume and hair and beard. So while I was trying to figure out Orlok for the second try at *Nosferatu*, I saw *It: Chapter Two*, and when I saw Bill as the sort of human version of Pennywise, as this middle-aged man with a lot of darkness and believability for that age, I thought, 'That's Orlok.'"

The casting – which includes actors who have previously played Renfield (Hoult in *Renfield*) and Max Schreck (Dafoe in *Shadow of the Vampire*) – went through other changes along the way. Depp took over the Ellen role initially filled by *Witch* star Anya Taylor-Joy, and singer-turned-actor Harry Styles was briefly part of the ensemble. From the start, however, a number of the key craft positions were filled by artists who have been part of Eggers' stable since *The Witch*, including cinematographer Jarin Blaschke and production designer Craig Lathrop. *Nosferatu*'s visual scheme can be described as black and white in color – and considering the source material, and that Eggers and co. went monochromatic with *The Lighthouse*, one has to wonder if they considered black and white for their latest film.

"No," Eggers says, "because I felt there were things about Wisborg and Transylvania in the daytime that would be much more enriching with color, even though the palette is very desaturated and pale. This sort of lack of color in color can at times be more oppressive. And also, no one's going to finance a movie of this scale in black and white right now [*laughs*]."

"Our tastes in general are not high-saturation," Blaschke notes. "Rob doesn't like a lot of color, at all. Watching his movies, that's obvious. So we desaturate a little bit more than the norm. And the night scenes, in the moonlight, aren't really about looking black and white. At nighttime, I just don't see color; I don't think anyone does. So I don't represent color at night because I don't see it myself."

Blashke adds, "The one color Rob likes in life is red; it's the only strong color I've ever seen him wear. But in *Nosferatu*, he knew he needed to use it very judiciously and conservatively. So when you see blood, that's the only red around; everything else has sort of had the life sucked out of it. There's one room that has a little bit of brown, and there was a lot of debate between Craig, Rob and myself about, is this going to read as red or is it going to read more greyish? But other than that, no red."

> "Every single Orlok's shadow is actually me doing it. The first few scenes I did with Lily-Rose, I wasn't even acting; I was just sitting there, being a shadow hand behind the camera." - Bill Skarsgård

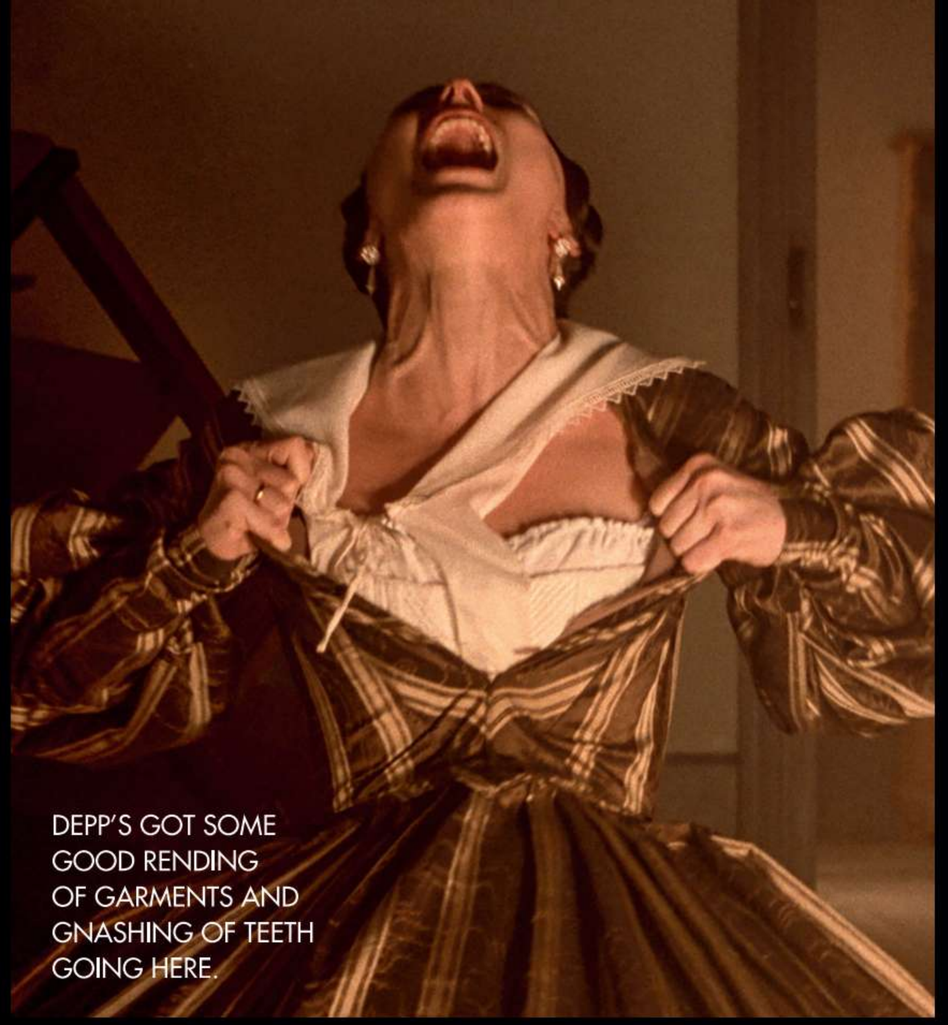
The cinematographer adds that he didn't look to the previous *Nosferatu*s for any visual cues. "I watched the first one early on when we first talked about this, back in 2015, but I haven't seen it since, on purpose. I haven't seen Herzog's ever. I've seen clips and sequences, some

CHARACTER ACTOR SIMON MCBURNEY AS KNOCK.

imagery from it, enough to know that there's no direction we were going to go that would have any visual link to that film."

"They used some castles in the Czech Republic in the original, which I did go see," Lathrop recalls. "The problem was, everything there has now been whitewashed and beautifully restored and ready for the tourists to come through. That's not what we wanted; we wanted a Gothic castle for Orlok that felt like it was decaying. The feeling should be that Orlok went to sleep 100 years ago, and everything is just falling apart, and then he's reawakened by Ellen and comes out of his world. It is a much older world that he represents, and also its decay, and we wanted to see all of that not only in his castle, but the place he chooses to move into in Wisborg, the manor house."

With the exception of a few exteriors, *Nosferatu* was shot entirely on sets constructed at Prague's Barrandov Studio, including several blocks of the town of Wisborg. This allowed Lathrop and his team to visually reflect the deterioration resulting from the arrival of Orlok and his attendant plague. "It's almost like Wisborg is being infected by Orlok as well," the designer says. "When you see it at the beginning, it's a bustling and exciting city with a lot of things moving around. And then you see that same place, especially on the streets, during the plague, and it's all boarded up and has a very different feeling. There's an optimism at the beginning of the film for everybody except Ellen, the optimism of the period – the Biedermeier period [which saw the rise of the middle class in Central Europe in the first half of the 19th century]. It wasn't just the aristocracy; certainly the Hardings have money, and it's a new world. And when Orlok comes, everything falls apart."



DEPP'S GOT SOME GOOD RENDING OF GARMENTS AND GNASHING OF TEETH GOING HERE.

Skarsgård in particular appreciated all the craftsmanship surrounding him while making *Nosferatu*: "I remember coming to set for the first time, and how excited Robert was to take us on a tour of everything that was being built. Even the exteriors were constructed on the lot, which was standard back in the day but has gotten rare now. Everything tends to be bluescreen and digital and CGI, but this wasn't. The crews and the set builders in Prague were outstanding, and walking all around Orlok's castle interiors, I was amazed by the detail they put into it. You could put a magnifying glass to every little crack and crevice, and everything looked authentic. And almost all the lighting inside the castle was actual candles. There would be, like, 50 live candles going, and Jarin would run in and put out a few or light a few more to get the right level. It felt old-school, man – very analog and very refreshing."

He adds that one of the key visual gambits carried over from the original *Nosferatu*, the shadow play of the vampire's clutching hand, was also achieved live on set. "Every single Orlok's shadow is actually me doing it. The first few scenes I did with Lily-Rose, I wasn't even acting; I was just sitting there, being a shadow hand behind the camera."

These moments are just part of the creepy atmosphere that suffuses *Nosferatu*, which is fully devoted to bringing a sense of Gothic menace back to its genre. As Eggers noted above, "One of the things I was fighting against was the sad, romantic vampire. I love *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, for example, and this isn't a criticism, but Dracula in that is like a tragic antihero, and I wanted my vampire to be legitimately scary and demonic. Bill does give Orlok some nuance and vulnerability, enough that in the end, it's more effective because of Bill's care and attention to the characterization. But when audiences in 1922 went to see *Nosferatu*, and Hutter threw the lid off of the sarcophagus, I think people could smell the nasty, dirty corpse in there. And that's what I wanted to give to audiences today."

The release of *Nosferatu* also represents the end of a rewarding, near-decade journey for the people behind it. "I feel like it has been so long in the making that it's a culmination of what we've all been working toward, both creatively and technically," Blaschke says. "It really satisfies some things that personally, as a cinematographer, I've been striving after since film school. So that's very satisfying – and also kind of sad, because now we have to come up with something new. So we'll see what that is." 💀

L-R: DIRECTOR AND CO-WRITER ROBERT EGGERS, PICTURED WITH STARS NICHOLAS HOULT (THOMAS HUTTER) AND WILLEM DAFOE (PROF. ALBIN EBERHART VON FRANZ).

THE CALLS FOR EQUALITY ARE COMING FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE

BY HANNAH TAYLOR

ON ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY, WE EXAMINE *Black Christmas*' MOST ENDURING GIFT – AND HOW ITS REMAKES WRAPPED UP THEIR OWN TAKES.

In 1974, Bob Clark created what would become a seminal slasher that continues to influence the genre to this day. While the genesis of the slasher film can be credited to a few different titles, *Black Christmas* was the most wholly formed proto-slasher, and its influence – including breathy POV shots and calls from the killer inside the house – is impossible to deny on later genre staples. Though, at the time, not the box office success that distributors hoped it would be, it's now a cult classic that persists half a century later. And one of the most lasting elements of the film – and perhaps what helped solidify its legacy – is the narrative centering of a motley crew of fully-realized young women. While initially seen as an exploitative shocker that kills for kicks, *Black Christmas* is now best remembered as a feminist flick far ahead of its time.

The 1970s were a decade ripe with social change, and *Black Christmas* was released only a year after the landmark abortion protections decided by the Supreme Court of the United States with *Roe v. Wade*. But it would be another 14 years before Canada – where *Black Christmas* was filmed and set – legalized abortion. So it's a big deal to see our protagonist Jess Bradford (Olivia Hussey) decide to get an abortion after discovering she's become pregnant by her boyfriend Peter (Keir Dullea). *Black Christmas* isn't a movie *about* abortion – the plotline is something of a red herring, with Peter's inability to cope with his girlfriend's decision making him a prime suspect once someone starts

THE ORIGINAL *BLACK CHRISTMAS* (RIGHT AND BELOW) SET A TEMPLATE THAT THE REMAKES EACH INTERPRETED TO VARYING SUCCESS.

terrorizing the women of Jess' sorority house – but that almost makes its inclusion more surprising.

Still, let's be clear: *Black Christmas* is about a mysterious killer who verbally and physically brutalizes women, and about a failing justice system that chooses not to act until the men of the film raise hell. There is a carefully crafted subtlety to the misogyny written into this film's men, and even the sorority girls make remarks like, "You can't rape a townie." But as with most horror classics, new filmmakers have sought to put their stamp on the films that influenced them, further imbuing their versions with the meanings they took from the original. Like a game of telephone, each rendition makes more apparent certain aspects that existed deep within the first film, and secondary details come to the forefront. Although *Black Christmas* never got a slew of sequels, it does have two extremely distinct remakes from two different eras in horror history.

The first remake – Glen Morgan's *Black Christmas*, also stylized as *Black X-Mas* – came in 2006, the era of so-called "torture porn." It was a uniquely sepia-toned, vulgar, and hyper-gory time when genre directors were not overly concerned with feminism as a filmmaking principle.

Actually, feminism was not a primary focus almost anywhere during this period. After the 1990s, there was a misguided idea that we, as a society, were "post" feminism. There was no longer one universal issue to tackle like those that bolstered previous feminist waves, such as labor, suffrage, abortion rights, and so forth. There is always more work to be done, but rejecting the universality of the gendered experience, as it bolsters bio-essentialist ideas of gender, meant a lack of unified identity that caused the movement to be less pervasive in the public mind.

It's important to note that all three of the *Black Christmas* films take place within sorority houses, making them a microcosm for how we see women at the time. Sororities are surrogate families, and these films concern themselves with the aspects of society that contribute to the breaking down of the family unit. In 1974, that is represented through Jess' reluctance to start a family with Peter. In 2006, the film offers a much more sinister view of the family unit. Instead of focusing on how horrors can persist when men refuse to believe women, this remake makes a woman the root of all the evil that takes place. An incestuous predation gives birth to two killers – both Billy (Robert Mann) *and* Agnes (Dean Friss), the victims-turned-villains of a monstrously abusive mother (Karin Konoval).

Now post-post-feminism, a new wave has emerged to remind us that misogyny still runs rampant in our society. After Morgan's shocking and campy reimagining, another remake hit screens in 2019 to overcompensate with its social justice messaging. In the wake of #MeToo, the feminism that passively exists within the original film, and is largely absent from the second, becomes the entire thesis statement

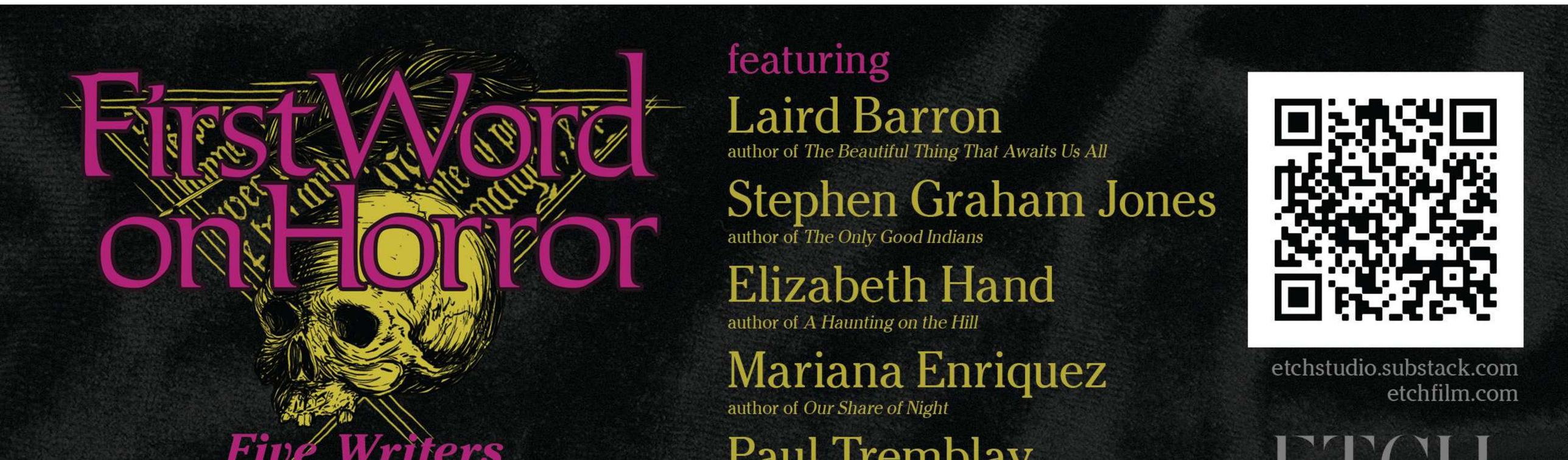
of the script written by Sophia Takal and April Wolfe. Directed by Takal, the *Black Christmas* of 2019 is an angry examination of rape culture as well as the relationships among women.

However, with only a few months to bring a script to fruition after being commissioned by Blumhouse, it's easy to see why the film has been critiqued as being too on the nose with its "t-shirt feminism." Takal's *Black Christmas* throws away all suggestions of subtlety. With characters declaring "not all men" or arguing with professors over their male-dominated syllabi, some moments can feel ham-fisted, but considering it was released during a presidency that reversed much of the progress made by past generations, it seems these elementary discussions of equality are still necessary. The film points to the way we sometimes re-traumatize and force survivors to politicize their existences, and the way we further victimize those who do speak out. It also interrogates how women are compliant in a system that will not hesitate to dispose of them.

Unfortunately, Takal's complete reimaging does away with any remnants of what we might expect from a *Black Christmas* film, eschewing many of the key elements that make for a successful slasher. The calls are certainly not coming from inside this house. That eschewal, and the film's lack of social subtlety, work against its own messaging. Campier moments, like a full-on black magic cult taking place in the fraternity house, undermine an otherwise serious film about the way society protects rapists, spiking it with a weird silliness. The villains of the story are said to be "simply men," a point that is immediately complicated by the fact that these men are possessed by the spirit of the university's sexist founder. It's all a distraction that takes away from the fact that the real horror of a story like *Black Christmas* is our reality.

With every year, and every remake, there is more to love about the original *Black Christmas*. It is the gift that keeps on giving, because as our world continues to change, its characters remain relevant and interesting. 50 years later, Bob Clark's film is a cherished relic and one of the best horror films of all time. Still, it should be interesting to see how history will remember these remakes as we move further away from their releases. Will 2019's *Black Christmas* eventually be reassessed like *Jennifer's Body* has been? The film's social commentary is extremely pointed, and although that allows viewers to poke holes through its surface-level engagement, it has important things to say – and you may be surprised at how many people out there still need to listen. 💀

THE KILLERS IN THE 2019 (LEFT) AND 2006 (RIGHT) REMAKES WANTED TO SLAY IN THEIR OWN WAY.



WEREWOLVES

HOWLING AT THE SUPERMOON

By Dane DiLiegro

SFX wizard Alec Gillis talks with the man in the lupine suit for Steven C. Miller's werewolf picture.

WHO WOULD WIN IN A FIGHT: FRANK GRILLO OR A WEREWOLF? WELL, WE'RE GONNA FIND OUT!

L-R: TOM TRUNDLE, JAMES MICHAEL CUMMINGS, THE AUTHOR (DANE DILIEGRO) AND JARON MARQUIS.

When we had makeup FX legend Alec Gillis present at this year's Chainsaw Awards alongside creature performer/actor Dane DiLiegro, the rapport between *Prey*'s monster and his maker was infectious and entertaining. We knew these two should have a sitcom, or a podcast, or maybe a buddy road movie.

Failing that – and we did – we knew we could pair them up to discuss their latest collaboration, the title creatures of Steven C. Miller's *Werewolves*. A paean to the practical FX we grew up with and loved, the film (which takes place in a world where lycanthropy is an epidemic) gave the pair a new canvas to create on, and another (increasingly rare) chance to make the magic happen "in camera."

We're honored to present these two dedicated artists in conversation, as DiLiegro adds "journalist" to his growing CV... and as Gillis humors him.

WE'RE NOT SURE WEREWOLVES TAKE DIRECTION, BUT GILLIS (AIDED BY TIM LEACH AND JON MILLER) IS WILLING TO TRY.

Dane DiLiegro: It's interesting – you were one of the first people I ever met in Los Angeles. I sent a template email to all of the shops around town saying, 'Hey, I'm Dane DiLiegro, professional basketball player, 6'8", interested in creature acting, would love to stop by.' And you graciously responded and welcomed me [to visit Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc.].

Alec Gillis: Brain bug [from *Starship Troopers*] was there. You got to see the glory days of it.

DD: The Newborn [from *Alien: Resurrection*] was there.

AG: Yeah, we had a beautiful display room with lots of stuff.

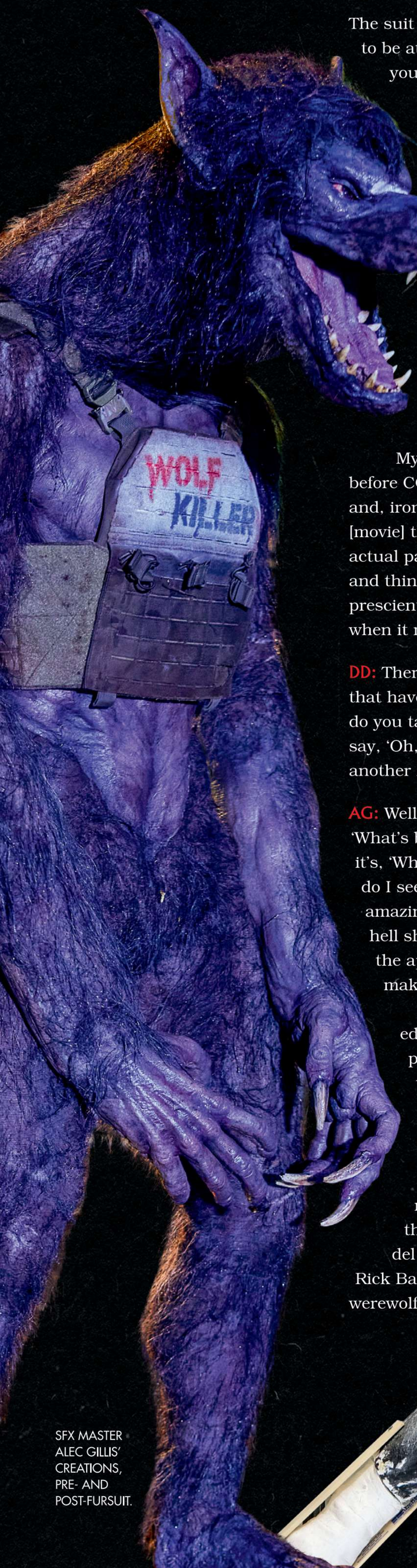
DD: You certainly did. You had an Alien fighting a Predator, which was amazing to me. I would hand you that trophy, that you've worked on more *Alien* and *Predator* films than any other person in the history of Hollywood.

AG: That's very interesting. I should do some research and see if that's correct, but I'll accept it.

DD: Which brings us together on *Prey*. You reached out to me on Instagram and said, 'Are you available in a few weeks? We need a reference guy for the design pitch for this project in Canada.'

AG: You registered in my mind. I believed that you had the abilities and certainly the physicality, because I'm a big believer in suit performers having an athletic base. And so I thought all that lined up, but that's also where I think I warned you that you can get pigeonholed. But you're doing a good job avoiding the pigeonhole because you are showing your face, you're getting roles.

DD: I wanted to be an actor, but I knew my avenue into the industry was through playing non-human characters. I was a stand-in on the movie *Free Guy*, because I was the tallest guy in their roster. The stunt coordinator, Chris O'Hara, said, 'Do you want to know your way into acting? You need to be a creature actor. There's five guys in the industry your size who essentially play all the monsters in film and television, and it's terrible, horrible work. It's 150 degrees inside the suit.



The suit weighs a hundred pounds. You have to be athletic, you have to be heat-resistant, you have to move well, but you get to be in big movies.'

So we do *Prey*. Obviously, *Prey* does what it does. It's received well. I was the Predator in that. Now, all of a sudden, I'm qualified. While we were shooting, you said, 'Hey, there's this werewolf movie with Frank Grillo. I want to put you in for it.' That was the first time I heard about this movie, *Year Two*, which is now *Werewolves*.

AG: Yes, *Werewolves* was previously titled *Year Two*, and I was talking to Myles [Nestel], the producer, about it before COVID. Then the pandemic happened and, ironically, it's a werewolf pandemic [movie] that was all but killed because of the actual pandemic. I kept thinking about it and thinking, 'Oh man, how amazing, how prescient that it's a pandemic movie.' And then when it resurfaced, it was very, very exciting.

DD: There have been a lot of werewolf films that have come to us through the years. How do you tackle a project like that, where people say, 'Oh, it's just another *Howling*, it's just another *Dog Soldiers*?'

AG: Well, it isn't easy. It used to just be like, 'What's been done in the movies before?' Now, it's, 'What's being done in gaming? What do I see on Instagram from artists that are amazing all over the world, doing cool as hell shit?' It is hard to find the angle or the approach that is going to make it fresh.

And then it's a double-edged sword with a popular genre like werewolves. You can kind of point to the various types: there's the very humanoid werewolf that might be the Benicio del Toro, Rick Baker werewolf, *The Wolfman*, which hearkens back to the 1940s versions. Then you have the long-snouted, iconic suits, which would be *The Howling*, *Dog Soldiers*. *American Werewolf* sort of fits in between, because he's not bipedal; he's quadrupedal. So you have a lot to look at and go, 'Well, is there anything that's outside this a little bit?' With *Werewolves*, I didn't want bulk. I didn't want a lot of WWE kind of physiques. I wanted something muscular but slender, long, elongated. So, for me, it was very important to have people who are the right size in it.

I tend to think that a lot of times werewolves get very bat-headed. It's like their heads just bulk out too much. They become very wide and round-faced, and a wolf actually has narrow shoulders and a very narrow face. So I wanted to try to get a little bit more of that wolf-like quality, but can't narrow the shoulders down. So what I was going for was a nice, broad, Frank Frazetta-style body with a very narrow head.

DD: Using my shoulders, using the broad shoulders.

AG: Yeah, your shoulders are very broad, and so we could also pack onto that to make the head look smaller, narrow. There's a certain stylization. The double-edged sword is that you want to do something new and that's hard to do, but the positive side of that is that people have expectations about what a werewolf looks like. So you're filling a classic archetype, and there's comfort in that. So you just have to do refinements and make something that is as cool as it can possibly be.

And I'm drawing off of my experiences on *Alien* movies. When we came back from *Aliens* and then we did Stan Winston's

SFX MASTER ALEC GILLIS' CREATIONS, PRE- AND POST-FURSUIT.

IAN FEUER'S CANINE GETS SOME IMPROMPTU DENTAL WORK ON HIS CANINES, COURTESY OF TIM LEACH.

PHOTOS BY KENNETH REXACH • COURTESY OF BRIARCLIFF ENTERTAINMENT, STEVEN C. MILLER AND ALEC GILLIS

Pumpkinhead, we were applying the rules that we learned from the *Alien*, which were H.R. Geiger's: how you disguise a human form, and then you just go, 'Well, this is going to be a classic demon. This is going to be a demon like Bernie Wrightson might design.' So those are kind of the rules that I applied to *Werewolves*.

How do you bring something fresh to the performance of a werewolf?

DD: I'm kind of operating in a laterally similar headspace in terms of werewolves through the years. People, they do the dog head shake; how do you tackle playing this monstrous human-canine while still making it your own? I can go back to *Prey* when [director] Dan [Trachtenberg] gave us the parameters of how he wanted the feral *Predator* to move. Look at what Kevin Peter Hall did with the original *Predator*. You had this sluggish, lurking thing shooting from the trees, and I had to make him more dynamic, primal. So it's kind of operating within the parameters of a Predator while still making it fresh and new, still being a werewolf, but not copying what past werewolves have done. I watch a lot of YouTube videos of the animal that I'm portraying. So in this case, how does an actual wolf move? What bits and pieces of a werewolf can I take and apply that and mix it with a human, mix it with what is driving this non-human character? At the baseline, I need to see what it looks like.

You and me, we've collaborated on big-scale and small-scale projects. How do you feel about those differences on set?

AG: At my age in the business, I feel like low-budget things are… *scrappy* is a good word. Why should the goal be to be just like everybody else who has a shit ton of money? Maybe it should, particularly in horror, be more about a community of people who are okay with the scrappiness and the outsider quality of it.

Maybe the lowest budget thing that we worked on was Abteen Bagheri's music video for Benjamin Earl Turner, called "Headspace." You played a character called Abib, which was an animatronic head with a big body.

And it's very interesting, it was sort of indie feeling, shot in 16mm. And we were walking you around in this suit with puppeteering happening in very decayed parts of Los Angeles to get a realistic kind of gritty setting.

It's a beautiful music video, and it was done super cheap. But for me, whether it's that or it's *Prey*, made with millions of dollars, it's the same experience when you're on set. And what's always great about you, Dane, is that you're game for those kinds of adventures.

And certainly, *Werewolves* was an adventure because it's not an extravagant film. We [shot] on location in Puerto Rico, and that was a blast. And we are out in the middle of the city with streets blocked off at three in the morning and cars overturned and on fire. But it was still, in its way, it was a very economically done movie. It reminds me of *Aliens* in a way. *Aliens* was not the biggest budget movie going at the time. It had a healthy budget, but we were figuring out clever ways to do things.

And like [*Aliens* director James Cameron], [*Werewolves* director] Steven Miller has a run-and-gun attitude. We don't have storyboards of everything.

EVEN WEREWOLVES ENJOY A GOOD SPA DAY.

YOU JUST KNOW THAT WET DOG SMELL WAS HARD TO GET RID OF.

We sit and we talk about what's the scene, and he's got it very clearly laid out in his mind. And he's a great field marshal of a director, knows where to place the camera. He'll ask a few questions: 'What can this do? What can it not do?' And then it's like he is itching to shoot something, and if he's not shooting by a certain time, he's getting kind of cranky.

You just hustle through, you get the setup, the broad strokes, and then you refine as each take goes. You're not laboriously shooting too many takes either. And in doing that, he's working quickly, he's getting lots of coverage, and that's what makes an action sequence flow beautifully. And so we can mush into a wide variety of approaches as long as we're all game to do that. We're not necessarily in a soul-crushing, big-studio, green-screen situation where we're a portion of a shot and it's got lots and lots of elements that have to be generated in post. You get it in the camera and it's real firelight reflecting on people, and it's a blast. It's a very energizing style of filmmaking.

DD: I would say we are probably frequent collaborators at this point. And I think a big factor of the things that we've worked on together is the trust. There's claustrophobia, there are animatronics in my head. There are very heavy suits I'm wearing. I trust you, I trust the crew. And it's this level of comfort, just that kind of subconscious flow that we would get into where I'm going to come in, I'm going to help everyone do their job, they're going to help me do my job. Let's make the greatest picture that we can. I'm going to make you look good, you're going to make me look good, and we're going to have fun while we're doing it.

And it's those special moments that happen off screen that translate onto the great stuff on screen. And you go home, you shower all the foam latex off, and you get in bed and you're like, 'You know what? As painful as it was today, I had a lot of fun. And I fucking love this. I love this.'

This conversation was edited for length and clarity. 💀

AN EARLY CONCEPT SKETCH BY MICHAEL V. EPPINETTE.

GILLIS LOOKS INTO THE FACE OF WHAT HE HATH WROUGHT.

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BY RICHARD NEWBY

WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLF?

LEIGH WHANNELL ON WOLF MAN

THE DIRECTOR OF *THE INVISIBLE MAN* RETURNS TO THE CLASSIC UNIVERSAL ROGUES' GALLERY TO GET WOLFY WITH IT.

"When was the last time you saw a truly scary werewolf film?" It's a question director Leigh Whannell posed to me during this interview, and it's a question I didn't have an answer for. There have been a lot of really good recent werewolf movies that have ranged from funny to action-packed to poignant. But truly scary? I've got nothing.

Leigh Whannell hopes to change that with *Wolf Man*, a reimagining of Universal's classic 1941 monster movie, *The Wolf Man*. In the vein of his nerve-shredding and grounded reinterpretation of *The Invisible Man*, don't expect *Wolf Man* to offer the familiar. Get ready to face some strange ch-ch-changes.

The road to *Wolf Man* has been a winding one, with your leaving the project and then returning to it. I'm curious how much your core concept for *Wolf Man* evolved during that absence?

It really stuck to my core concept. My wife, Corbett [Tuck] and I wrote the script together, and the original idea that we worked out stayed. When I had left the project for a while, they went in another direction. And I was lucky enough that when the project came back around to me, I was able to go back to my script. I didn't actually have to use any of the previous material.

You know those movies where you see credits for writing and there's like 12 names on the screen right afterwards? It's never a good sign. This movie isn't like that, even though it's changed hands a couple of times.

What stood out to me from the trailer is that it immediately made me think of Cronenberg's *The Fly*.

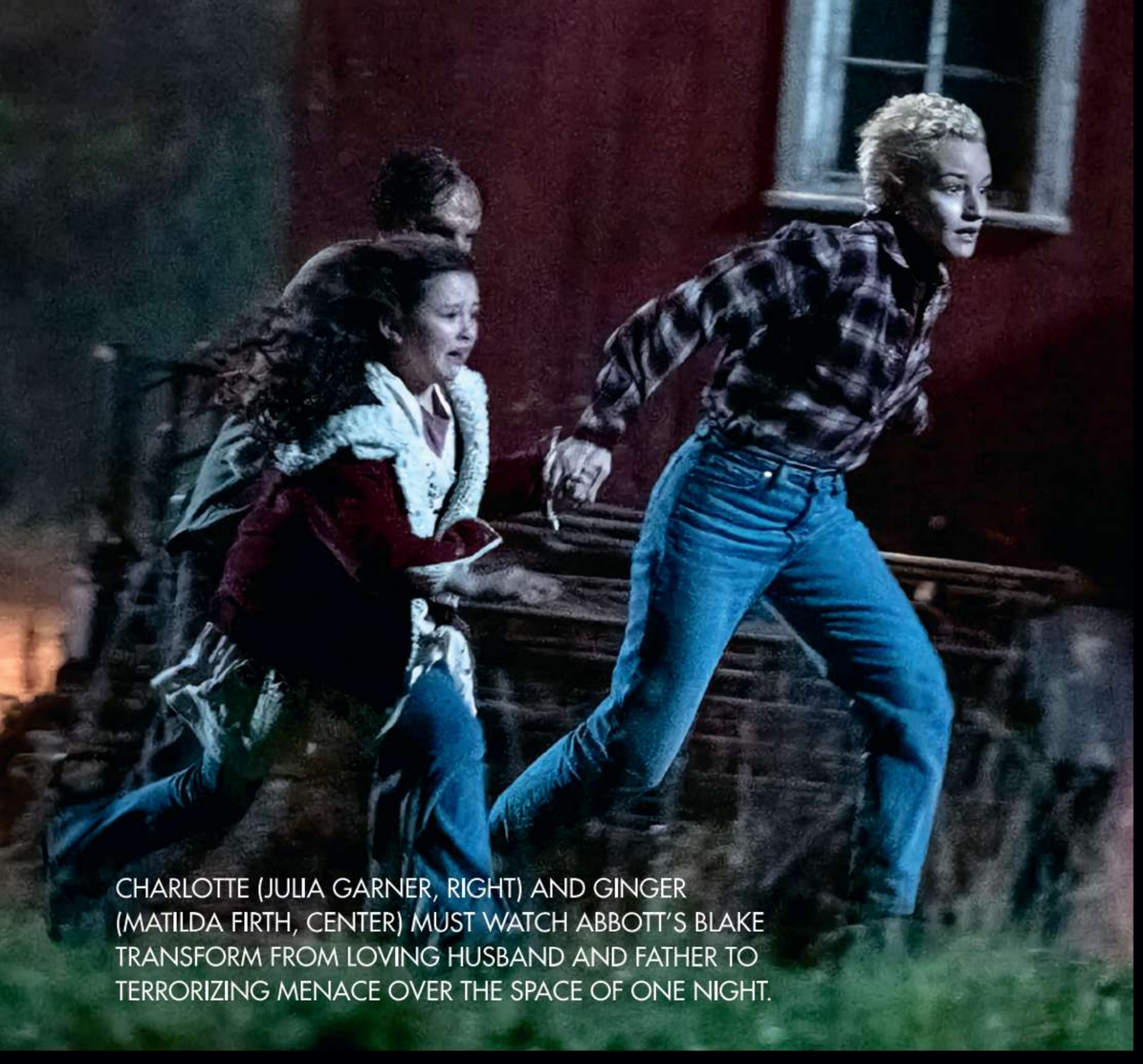
It's so good that those are the vibes you got just from the trailer, because I was watching *The Fly* a lot when I was writing the film. And I was really inspired by that. I love body horror and early Cronenberg stuff. That's really what I was going for.

***The Fly* is one of my all-time favorite movies.**

It's so good. It's such a flawless movie, isn't it? It hasn't aged a day. It's still so intelligent.

Usually when I write a movie, I have this vision board. Sometimes it's a literal vision board, like a corkboard with photos and drawings or a notepad, and sometimes it's just in my mind. But there are always certain reference points; like when I

THIS PAGE AND FACING: CHRISTOPHER ABBOTT WAS "COMPLETELY UNAFRAID" IN HIS APPROACH TO THE ICONIC MONSTER, ACCORDING TO DIRECTOR LEIGH WHANNELL.



CHARLOTTE (JULIA GARNER, RIGHT) AND GINGER (MATILDA FIRTH, CENTER) MUST WATCH ABBOTT'S BLAKE TRANSFORM FROM LOVING HUSBAND AND FATHER TO TERRORIZING MENACE OVER THE SPACE OF ONE NIGHT.

did *Upgrade*, the two little temples of worship that I was looking at were *The Terminator* and *RoboCop*.

With *Wolf Man*, I was thinking about *The Fly* and also *The Thing*, the way that John Carpenter approached this virus in *The Thing*. A lot of times, practical effects in the '80s would get used for the purposes of humor. If you think about a film like *Re-Animator* or *Evil Dead II*, the prosthetics and the chainsaws, it's laughter that they're going for. But there's a handful of movies where the prosthetic makeup is not trying to make you laugh or gross you out. It's trying to move you. And I would say that those two movies would be *The Fly* and *The Thing*.

Well, that's a perfect segue into the design and prosthetics of the Wolf Man. I know that there was a promotional offering at Universal's Halloween Horror Nights which caused a bit of a stir. I don't know if you had any say in that.

No. It's tough, because when you make a movie for a big studio, there are so many different departments. Sometimes things slip through the cracks. You have to wait to see the finished movie, and then you think, 'Oh, okay.' Without spoiling anything, I can say that whatever people saw online from the Halloween Horror Nights isn't representative of what we've done, because Arjen [Tuiten], the makeup artist, and I really put a lot of work into the look of the wolf. I will say this, there is more than one wolf in this film. But there's no way that a bunch of people divorced from our process could recreate what Arjen did. Arjen's a beautiful artist.

One of the things that I love about you tackling these classic Universal Monsters is that it's not the exact same look that we got in the '30s and '40s. *The Invisible Man* suit was just incredible. And it felt fresh and grounded in our current world. I think that's an exciting part of creating a new version of these movies and these characters. You get a new look.

Revealing the look of the wolf is the fun part. The fun of a werewolf movie is seeing what it's going to look like. What direction are they going to go in? I had to pick a lane, and the lane that I really like is to keep things grounded.

Do you have a favorite werewolf film that influenced you?

My favorite werewolf film is *An American Werewolf in London*, but it wasn't an influence on this movie. The movies that were really an influence on me for this film are everything from *The Fly* and *Under the Skin* to *Amour*.

I was lucky enough to have a movie theater available to me during pre-production. We were in New Zealand and the studio where we were shooting just happened to have this brand spanking new movie theater. So we used it to put on a film festival. Every Wednesday during pre-production, we would have the Full Moon Film Club and we showed a different movie and I gave a little speech to the crew about what we were trying to do and what they should take out of this movie. We watched so many great films. Even *The Zone of Interest* influenced this film.

Tell me about the casting of your leads. What were you looking for when you were casting and how did you land on the choices that you did?

Well, when I write a movie, I don't usually think about a specific actor. I don't want to get tied to one person, because chances are you'll go to them and they'll say, 'I can't do it.' I like to sort of build a character in my mind. If anything, I'm thinking about people I know in my own life.

BLAKE FINDS A NEW WAY TO SCRATCH AN ITCH IN ONE OF THE FILM'S MOST HARROWING SCENES.

> "REVEALING THE LOOK OF THE WOLF IS THE FUN PART. THE FUN OF A WEREWOLF MOVIE IS SEEING WHAT IT'S GOING TO LOOK LIKE. WHAT DIRECTION ARE THEY GOING TO GO IN? I HAD TO PICK A LANE, AND THE LANE THAT I REALLY LIKE IS TO KEEP THINGS GROUNDED."
>
> – LEIGH WHANNELL

When Corbett and I were finished writing the script, my first thought was, 'I need a really great actor. I don't need a movie star. I don't need someone with great abs.' I needed someone who is willing to forgo their sense of pride or their sense of embarrassment and do things that… you're talking about people that have to act like an animal. It's not an easy thing to do in front of a crew. I think a lot of people are embarrassed by stuff like that. A lot of actors won't really go there.

If you think about Jeff Goldblum's performance in *The Fly*, he just dropped all his ego. I mean, can you imagine sitting for hours in a makeup chair and then going and doing that scene where he vomits on those donuts? This is stuff that a lot of quote, unquote, 'movie stars' would be afraid to do. You really need to find someone who has a lack of ego and a full-bore commitment.

I thought that Christopher Abbott would be that person. If you see his performances, whether he's in *Possessor* or *James White*, or a lot of these movies he does, it seems like he's not concerned with how he looks or how he's appearing. He's not preening for the camera. He's not trying to find the right angles for his jawline. He is completely unafraid. That seemed absolutely right for this role.

In terms of the prosthetics, how did that element affect what Abbott brought to the table as the character?

Chris likes to save it all for between action and cut. He's not somebody who comes onto the set with his heavy presence and needs to sit in the corner by himself until you call action. If anything, he was joking around. At one point I asked him why he was joking around so much. He said he had to, because he wants to save everything for when we're rolling camera. It's easy to make people laugh with stuff like this, extreme stuff. You need to finely calibrate the performance so that you're not being too extreme and over the top, and you're not underplaying it too much. He is really, really good at walking that tightrope.

I think the makeup helped him with that. The makeup helped him find exactly how sad or how tragic or how scary the guy should be at any given moment. There's nothing better than practical effects when you're on set. When you can actually touch something, it's just better. Anyone will tell you that acting against a green screen or imagining a set is not as fun as actually being there.

I'm told *Wolf Man* is not connected to *The Invisible Man*. It's not part of a new plan for a cinematic universe of Universal Monsters, correct?

Not part of a cinematic universe, but I would call it a spiritual cousin in terms

PHOTOS BY NICOLA DOVE • COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

THAT'S GONNA GET INFECTED: MAKEUP ARTIST ARJEN TUITEN AND CREW TEND TO BLAKE'S LIFE-CHANGING SCRATCH.

of the tone. I think if you put these films side by side, *Invisible Man* and *Wolf Man*, you will see a connection; not a connection in the Marvel way, where you're dropping Easter eggs and saying, 'It's in the same universe,' but definitely a tonal connection. That is my approach to these monsters.

Do you have any updates on *The Invisible Man 2*?

No. For me, I thought we had a great ending that didn't call for another movie. But unfortunately, I don't own the rights to the character. There's nothing I can do about anyone making a sequel. But for me, I felt like that was a self-contained story.

I've been the co-creator of two long-running franchises [*Saw* and *Insidious*]. And I've seen the way that Hollywood commerce can rip something away from its original intent. It changes. The more versions of something you photocopy, the less you see the original, the murkier it gets. It's driven by this relentless engine of capitalism that Hollywood has. But I'm not crying about it because *Saw* sequels helped give me freedom. I don't have to write a movie that I'm not passionate about because of money that has come in from the *Saw* films. But creatively I've witnessed how that has happened.

I want to be careful going forward about whether or not I want people to spin something off into a sequel. Some things really warrant a sequel, like a James Bond movie. I want to see the next Bond because you can plug that guy into a million different adventures, so they'll never run out of sequels. Whereas other movies, sometimes the sequel mouse wheel gets a little ridiculous.

To follow that up, are there any other Universal Monsters you want to lend your approach to as a one and done, your definitive take on the character?

I don't know, not really. I never really have a plan. Sometimes things just fall into my lap, or I let them find me. Because I write my own movies, it takes a long time for me to get excited about something. I know that when I'm directing a movie, it's going to be a long time. It's going to be a year or more of my life. And I'm going to have to spend time away from my kids and I'm going to have to sustain myself through that process. You really do need to have a core amount of passion about the concept. There's actually not another Universal Monster I feel passionate about. But if someone was to come along and say, 'Hey, what do you think about Jekyll and Hyde,' without even wanting to, I might suddenly have an idea for it and be like, 'Oh, now I have to do it, because I'm really interested in the idea.'

But right now? They say in this town, you're only as important or as valuable as your last movie. So each time I make a film, I'm like, 'Please just let this one go well.' So, I'm focused and all in on *Wolf Man* right now. 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

VIRAL LYCANTHROPY *AND* A HOME INVASION? CHARLOTTE AND GINGER DIDN'T SIGN UP FOR THIS.

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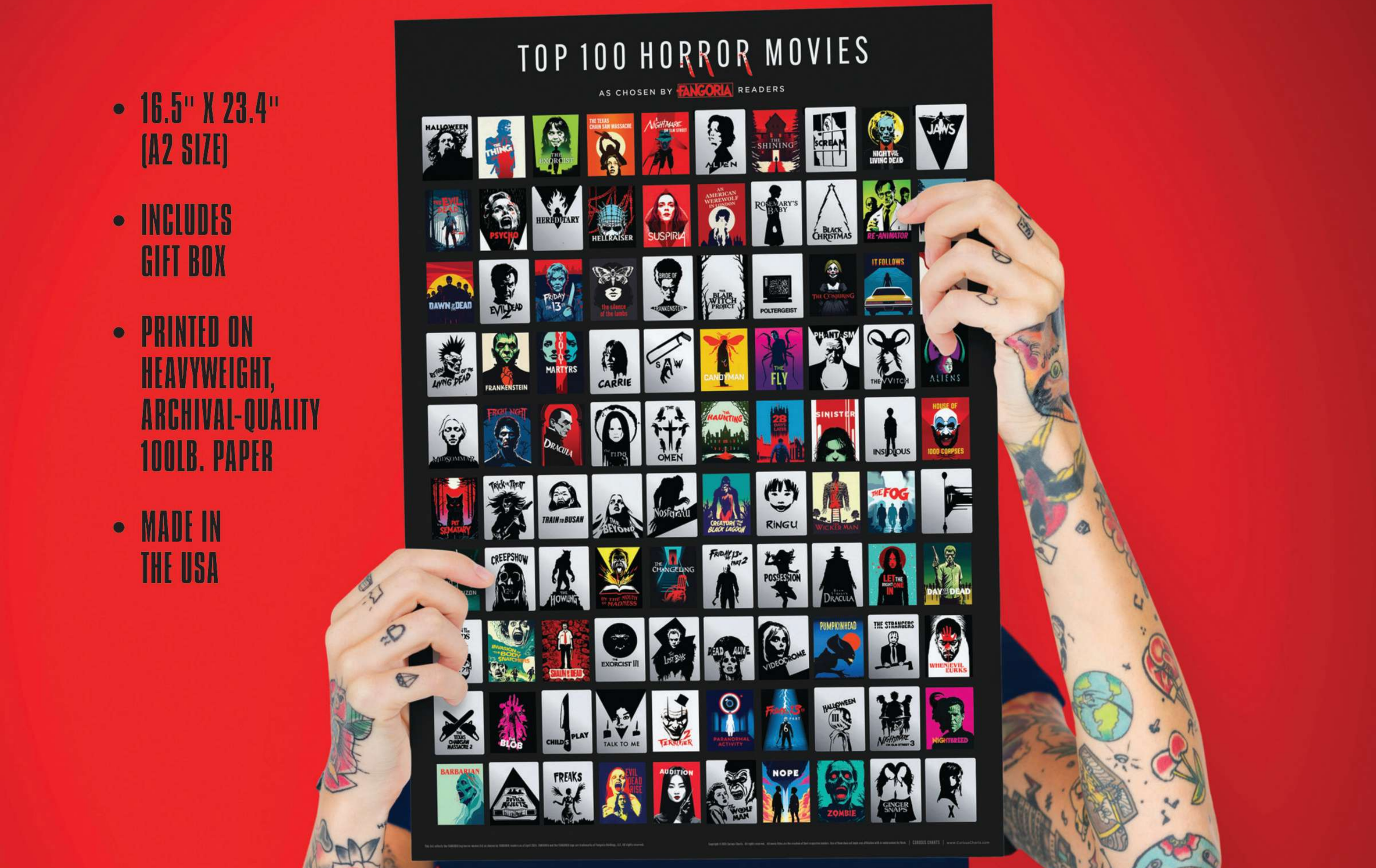

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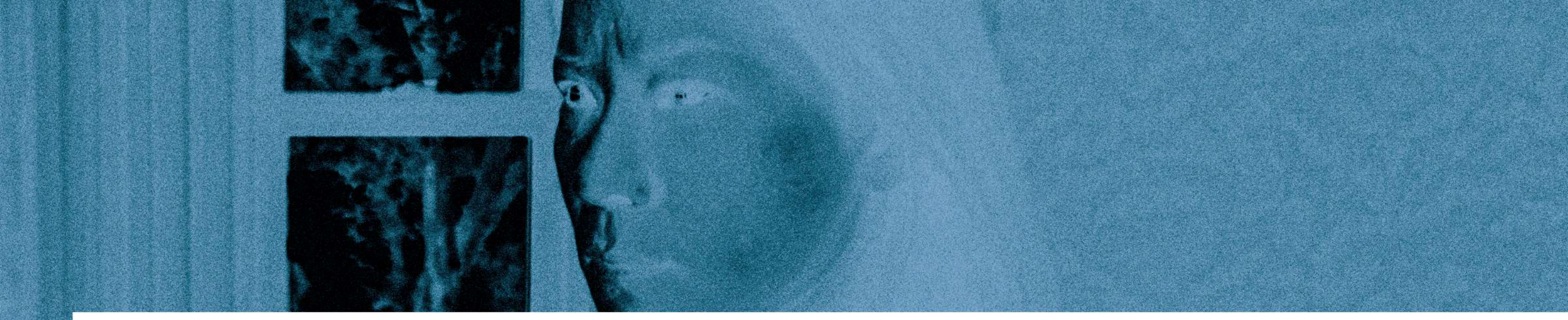
THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

The camera is the ghost in Steven Soderbergh's *Presence*, which means the legendary filmmaker isn't just directing the film — he's playing the title character.

By Phil Nobile Jr.



Director Steven Soderbergh's love of cinema has taken him to every corner of the cinematic sphere: drama, action, comedy, sci-fi, heist movie, revenge thriller. But it's rare and exciting when the filmmaker veers into our neck of the woods.

With his new film *Presence*, Soderbergh is not only venturing into scare territory, but he's set up a unique challenge for himself. A ghost trapped in a New Jersey home is navigating the property's new owners (Lucy Liu, Chris Sullivan) and their teen kids (Callina Liang, Eddy Maday), bearing witness to their most private struggles and eventually involving itself in their lives. It's perhaps the most human ghost story in years. But the other feat the film pulls off is it's presented entirely from the ghost's POV; the camera (operated by Soderbergh himself) is the presence, giving the entire endeavor an ethereal — and oddly emotional — approach.

Soderbergh spoke with FANGORIA about the challenges met and lessons learned on the unique DIY ghost story, which opens on January 17th.

HOUSE OF SECRETS: A GHOST ISN'T THE ONLY THING REBECCA (LUCY LIU) FEARS IN *PRESENCE*.

I want to talk about the idea of making the camera itself a character, via this subjective lens. And the fact that as the cinematographer, you're basically playing the ghost in the film.

Yeah. I was concerned conceptually that the audience might fall into a mode that an audience normally falls into when you're going pure POV with no reverses, which is a very strong desire to see a reverse angle. Because we are, I think, wired to want to look into the eyes of the character that's experiencing the story that we're being told.

I was banking on the fact that the audience would intuit fairly quickly that there's nothing to cut to, so this need to turn around would get mitigated. I think, based on the screenings that we've had, that's been borne out. And there was no plan B. This is how it was written to be executed.

Was it a quick or a protracted process, reading that script and deciding there's no plan B?

I came up with the basic premise and sent [writer] David Koepp the first eight pages, where I laid out the visual conceit, and that whatever it was that was in this house was somewhat activated by the fact that a family was about to move in. And that was kind of it. David filled out the rest pretty quickly.

The shoot was three weeks. It could have been shorter, except I was trying to shoot in-sequence as much as possible because I wanted to be learning how it should look at things as the movie went on. I wanted it to get better at figuring out where to look as it's in the house for a longer period of time. And I felt like shooting out of sequence and trying to reverse-engineer that would be difficult.

The thing that surprised me most is that I was having an emotional response to camera work. You feel the camera get tense, you feel it get angry, you feel it being sad. I'd love to hear more about how you found that language of the camera.

CHLOE (CALLINA LIANG) SENSES THE PRESENCE; CONVINCING HER FAMILY IS ANOTHER MATTER.

There were some descriptions in the script that were very specific about where the camera needed to be in order to put the point across. But a lot of times, it was up to me to decide how I wanted to choreograph a given scene. And so on the one hand, there's a lot of freedom and a lot of options there. But on the other hand, the restriction of the point of view, and my ultimate knowledge of whose point of view it is, drove things in a certain direction. But it was shocking to me, too, how emotive the imagery could be, even without knowing anything. Even the opening shot, you understand it's someone stuck here and they're wondering where everybody went. As it's looking around the house, it clearly can't get out and it's alone, and there's something immediately sad about that.

> "It may be the simplest idea that I've ever had in my career, when you think about it, and I love the simplicity of it."
>
> - Steven Soderbergh -

The tricky part was neutralizing the impulse as a camera operator that I have to anticipate where people are going to go. I was trying to find this line of lag time in reacting to when the characters would move in a way that I thought was appropriate for something that didn't know what was going to happen. And unfortunately, there were a couple of long takes where we'd get way into a take and somebody would move, and I would feel like I anticipated it instead of building in a little bit of reaction in a pan, and I would have to say, 'I'm sorry, we have to do this again.'

The performance anxiety that I felt at times was, I'm sure, on a par with what the actors were feeling, especially the further you'd get into a take, the more you would start to feel, 'Oh, maybe we might get it on this one.' We shot it with a Sony A7 camera with one of the small Ronin rigs, so it's around 12 pounds, which is not that heavy – unless you're holding it out from your body with your arms straight for eight minutes, then it starts to get weird. So it was challenging, and going up and down the stairs was terrifying.

Is that why you made the movie, essentially? You're challenging yourself to do something totally new to you?

It may be the simplest idea that I've ever had in my career, when you think about it, and I love the simplicity of it. And the restrictions of it were liberating in a way. It was fun and always interesting, and I think the actors enjoyed the dance that I had with them. I'm usually operating the camera on my films, but this was a new level of engagement with the cast. They could smell me.

Would you make this movie differently today based on what you've learned?

I think there's only one way to do it. And there'd be no joy in doing it again. You know what I mean? In terms of this gimmick, I feel like there's no

sequel, even philosophically, to this conceit. It's kind of a one-off, which also made it exciting.

How did the process of filming those long takes change the way you planned or rehearsed your day? Talk to me about getting it in the can.

Well, the days were pretty short in that regard because, for instance, in order to shoot in sequence, there are a couple of scenes that are right at the edge of dusk. You can't fake that in the morning and then stay all day and try and shoot another version of it. That would be a 14-hour day, which I'm not going to do.

I resisted, since I was paying for it. I think if it had been a third party paying for it, they would've looked at this schedule and gone, 'You're fat. You should be doing this a lot faster,' and I didn't want to do it that way.

It was not indulgent, but if you didn't care about certain things directorially, you probably could have chopped several days off that schedule. But I wanted to do it a certain way, so it was leisurely by most standards.

What movies informed the making of this film?

I was hard-pressed to come up with a direct comp. My homework normally on a movie is to watch a series of films that I feel are directly related to the thing I'm about to shoot. This one was trickier. Obviously, I thought a lot about Polanski. I thought a lot about Kubrick. It seemed to be in that vein of approach and style. And yet both of those filmmakers are also expert at editing, in the traditional sense of the word.

But the visual rigor that they both employ when they shoot... I was looking for a discovered precision because I didn't want it to feel so machine-tooled that it wasn't alive. But I also wanted it to be very precise in its choices from frame to frame. So, that's why the blocking was where we spent a lot of time trying to figure out how people were moving and where I should move. The amount of time spent rehearsing versus shooting, that ratio was probably eight to one.

How did that ratio land with the cast members? Because it's probably an unusual way of working for a lot of film actors.

They loved it. It was almost like doing mini-plays. And they loved the fact that each scene played out in a single shot because it allows you to really feel the rhythm of the scene. Then when you got it, you're done. There's no extra coverage. So now what that means is I have to be more exacting in making sure that I've got what I want performance-wise, because that's it.

After a normal scene, if an actor has expressed some concern that we didn't get what we were supposed to get, I assure them, 'Oh, believe me, I got it. I got this piece from that take. I got this piece from that. I've got what I need to put this together.' Here, I had to make sure I had everything exactly the way I wanted it, but they were ready. They were all staying together

in a motel close to the location in New Jersey and rehearsing at night amongst themselves. So they were primed.

What conversations did you and NEON have about how to market this film? This is a hard film to sell in a lot of ways.

This is something that NEON and I have been talking about a lot, making sure that we're creating an expectation that we're going to meet. And I think

PHOTOS BY PETER ANDREWS • COURTESY OF THE SPECTRAL SPIRIT COMPANY

CHRIS (CHRIS SULLIVAN) AND REBECCA FEAR FOR CHLOE'S MENTAL HEALTH, BUT SHE MIGHT BE THE ONLY ONE IN THE HOUSE WHO KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING.

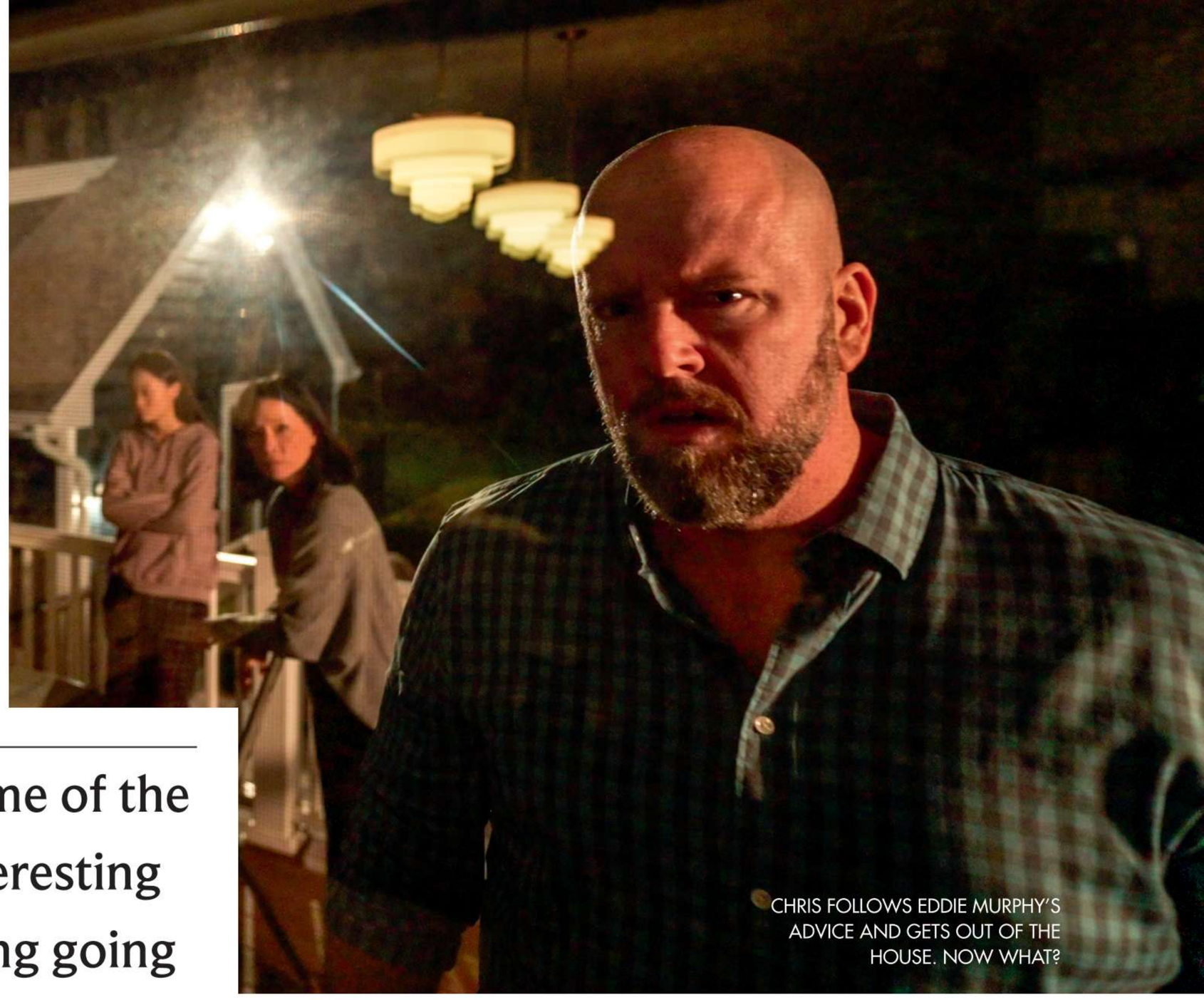
they've done a great job with the materials that have come out so far, and that are going to come out, in presenting what we made and not setting people up for something that we didn't make. Because there's no blood in it, but it's a very emotionally violent film.

We had walkouts at some screenings. It's because, I think, for some people who find the threats in the movie triggering, there's no escape. No matter what your take on the movie is, there is a participatory aspect of being in that POV that, for some people at certain moments, is unnerving.

I want to talk about some of the smaller choices, the way the details of the paranormal were introduced. It felt like a delicate weaving because, if you don't sell the reality of this, you're sunk, right? Like the casting of the medium who presented as such a real, blue-collar person.

My mom was a parapsychologist. She was sort of like the Beatrice Straight character in *Poltergeist*. The first version of the medium scene was a little more theatrical, and I went back to David and said, 'Let's go another way. I don't want you to be laughing at her.' He came back with what is in the film, which is this regular woman who, on her lunch break, gets brought over here to do this and is so worn out by it. That was an actress [Natalie Woolams-Torres] that I knew from a play that I produced, and I had her in mind for this.

I felt it was important that the audience and half of the family be really engaged by her and believed that she was experiencing what she's experiencing, that it wasn't going to help the movie if it felt like she was a hoax or a con. And I grew up around someone who took this aspect of our world very seriously, so I was probably predisposed to make sure that was not cartoonish.



CHRIS FOLLOWS EDDIE MURPHY'S ADVICE AND GETS OUT OF THE HOUSE. NOW WHAT?

> "I think some of the most interesting filmmaking going on in the US right now is happening in the horror space."
>
> - Steven Soderbergh -

What's your experience with the horror genre as a viewer?

I think some of the most interesting filmmaking going on in the US right now is happening in the horror space. Filmmakers are taking advantage of this genre as a delivery system for their own ideas and preoccupations. But what's great about it as a genre, especially for young, independent filmmakers, is it's so accessible. You don't need a lot of money if you've got a really good idea to make a horror film.

It's interesting here because the narrative is always: 'It's a good foot in the door for a new filmmaker.' But here's a guy who has nothing left to prove to anyone, who's nevertheless still using that low-budget DIY model for this movie. You paid for it yourself.

It's an approach I've used before where I just go pay for something and then sell it later, and that seems to work. But there's nothing quite like the pleasure, if you can set it up that way, of just doing it all on your own and not having to talk to anybody. That's the best version.

What did you learn on *Presence* that you'll take with you onto another project?

A continuing desire to distill things to their absolute essence, directorially. The idea of looking at something and instead of asking, 'How many shots is this?', it's 'How few? How few shots can I do this in and still have the audience feeling what I want them to feel?'

You've said before that feature films don't have the relevance culturally that they used to. There's an audience coming up behind you and me that's ingesting movies in 60-second chunks on TikTok. Is there any way to reinvest audiences in the feature film experience?

Apparently, that's happening. 25 and under are starting to go to the movies again in numbers, and they're educating themselves about filmmakers. They know who Rick Linklater is, and who Spike Lee is, and they are cinephiles. They've come out the other end, I think, of watching whatever they've been watching most of their lives, and they're seeking something else. That is good news. I'm encouraged by that.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Christploitation

Praise Jesus... Or Else! Can I Get A Slay-Men?

By Sean Abley

When the Ormond family of exploitation filmmakers cast us into the fiery pits of Christian horror.

In the beginning, Christian morality films offered gentle stories of redemption. Enter the Ormond family. After surviving both a commuter plane crash landing, and months later a stalled engine mid-flight, low-budget filmmaker Ron Ormond, along with his wife June and their son Tim, found God. The family turned from exploitation titillation to Christploitation salvation, and all Hell broke loose.

Groundwork for the "scare" genre, in general, was already well-laid in the '30s and '40s by drug films like *Reefer Madness* and *She Shoulda Said No!*, as well as anti-sex films like *Sex Madness* and the notorious Kroger Babb's *Mom and Dad* (which included footage of actual childbirth). And then there were anti-communist, "Red scare" films: The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), tasked with rooting out communism in the United States, simmered in the background from 1938 through 1975. *Red Planet Mars* and *It Came From Outer Space* are two sci-fi horror standouts, but every genre bore witness to the Red menace.

All flavors of cinematic "Danger!" films would come together soon after the Ormonds' second plane incident. Ron was approached by evangelical preacher Estus W. Pirkle, a Baptist minister whose star was on the rise in the Bible Belt. Pirkle wanted to simply film his more notable tales of fire and brimstone for posterity, but Ron, who spent most of his career cranking out low-budget Lash LaRue westerns and the occasional white trash drive-in fare, had other ideas. What ultimately sprang from Pirkle's signature sermon and Ormond's exploitation eye was 1971's ultraviolent, gore-filled epic, *If Footmen Tire You What Will Horses Do?*

In the film, Pirkle provides the wrap-around, charmlessly barking his sermon about the failings of modern man at a church full of worshippers. Meanwhile Judy sits in the pew to "be seen in the proper places." Judy is,

let's be honest, a total drunken slut on the road to Hell. We know this because we flash to Judy's past as a total drunken slut on the road to Hell. Will Judy be saved???

As Pirkle punches us with his sermon, the film serves up scenes of innocent, God-fearing American Christians being tortured and killed. Not even five minutes into the film we're shown dead bodies riddled with bullet holes lying in the street; moments later, a group of murdered children, covered in blood, shown in closeup. Their crime? Remaining steadfast in their commitment to Christ.

And who's to blame for all this bloody mayhem? Godless Communists, that's who. Led by The Commissar (played by Cecil Scaife, a frequent presence in the Ormonds' films), the commies from an unnamed country make their way through a small town, destroying everything God-related in their path. Some of the militants' greatest hits include forcing a man's sons to drop him on a pitchfork, driving stakes into a child's ears to deafen him, and multiple group executions via machine gun. But The Commissar isn't all bad – in a touching moment, he gives a group of children candy after they agree to praise Fidel Castro instead of Jesus.

But the most depraved moment in all of *Footmen* is an encounter between the communist leader and a child outside a Christian church. Having just ordered the murder of the entire congregation, The Commissar is admiring his work when a young boy crosses his path. After the child refuses to step on a picture of Jesus, The Commissar decapitates him on the spot – on camera – and tosses his head into the bushes. (Fun fact: that boy was played by Pirkle's son.) As this moment is recounted by Pirkle from the pulpit, the mental image is too much for Judy to bear, and she immediately accepts Jesus as her personal savior.

Next on the slate was *The Burning Hell*. Tim Ormond stars as "Tim," a biker whose friend is decapitated in a horrible accident. When confronted with the fact his friend is most likely roasting in Hell for all eternity, Tim is convinced to form a personal relationship with Jesus.

THOSE PESKY COMMUNISTS ARE UP TO THEIR OLD TRICKS AGAIN.

The Burning Hell's agenda is to let those who might be wavering in their faith know that Hell really, really sucks. Tim staggers into a church after the accident, and is treated to a Pirkle sermon filled with stories of people from Bible times screwing up and finding out the Lake of Fire is a terrible vacation destination.

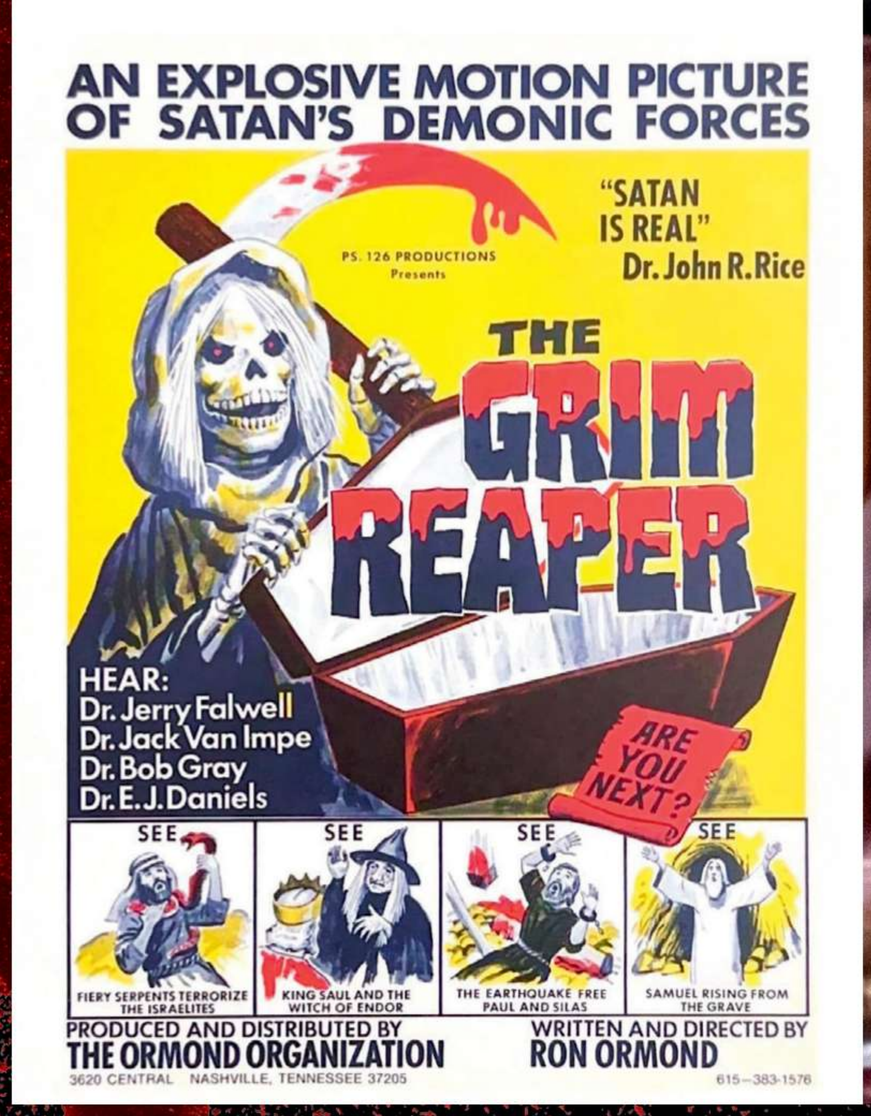
There's a little less gore this time around – just one decapitation, but some decent, squirm-inducing footage of people being eaten by maggots. What *The Burning Hell* truly excels at is the screen representation of a microbudget H-E-double-hockey-sticks. Featuring "Makeup Creations & Production" by "Mrs. June Ormond," Hell is filled with fire and populated with sinners dressed in burlap rags, with boils covering their melted flesh. Every tale told by Pirkle ends in this realm, where demons with clown makeup occasionally drop by to affirm that yes, you're here for the duration. As per Pirkle, "You'll see torture like you've never seen before!"

In 1976, the Ormonds would take a quick pause from Pirkle proselytizing to create *The Grim Reaper* for a company called Sword of the Lord, led by Dr. John R. Rice. After witnessing the Ormonds' success with Pirkle, the good doctor wanted in on the action, and the result was another "F-around and find out" tale about Hell. Tim stars as "Tim," a young preacher, and Scaife as "Vern," Tim's Christ-doubting father. Other casting includes June under heavy prosthetics (again of her own creation) in a star turn as "The Witch of Endor" and Jerry Falwell as "Dr. Jerry Falwell." The story begins at Tim's brother Frankie's funeral, with Vern furious at the local pastor for refusing to affirm his dead son is in Heaven because he wasn't saved in the eyes of the Lord.

The Grim Reaper is less gruesome than either *Footmen* or *The Burning Hell*, but what the film lacks in gore it makes up for in paranormal activities. Eddie's mother, desperate to speak to her son, organizes a séance. Turns out the consequence for using a psychic medium to talk to a dead guy is being plagued by visions of your son being dragged to, and tortured in, Hell.

The final cinematic Ormond/Pirkle concoction, in 1977, would be much lighter fare than all the rest.

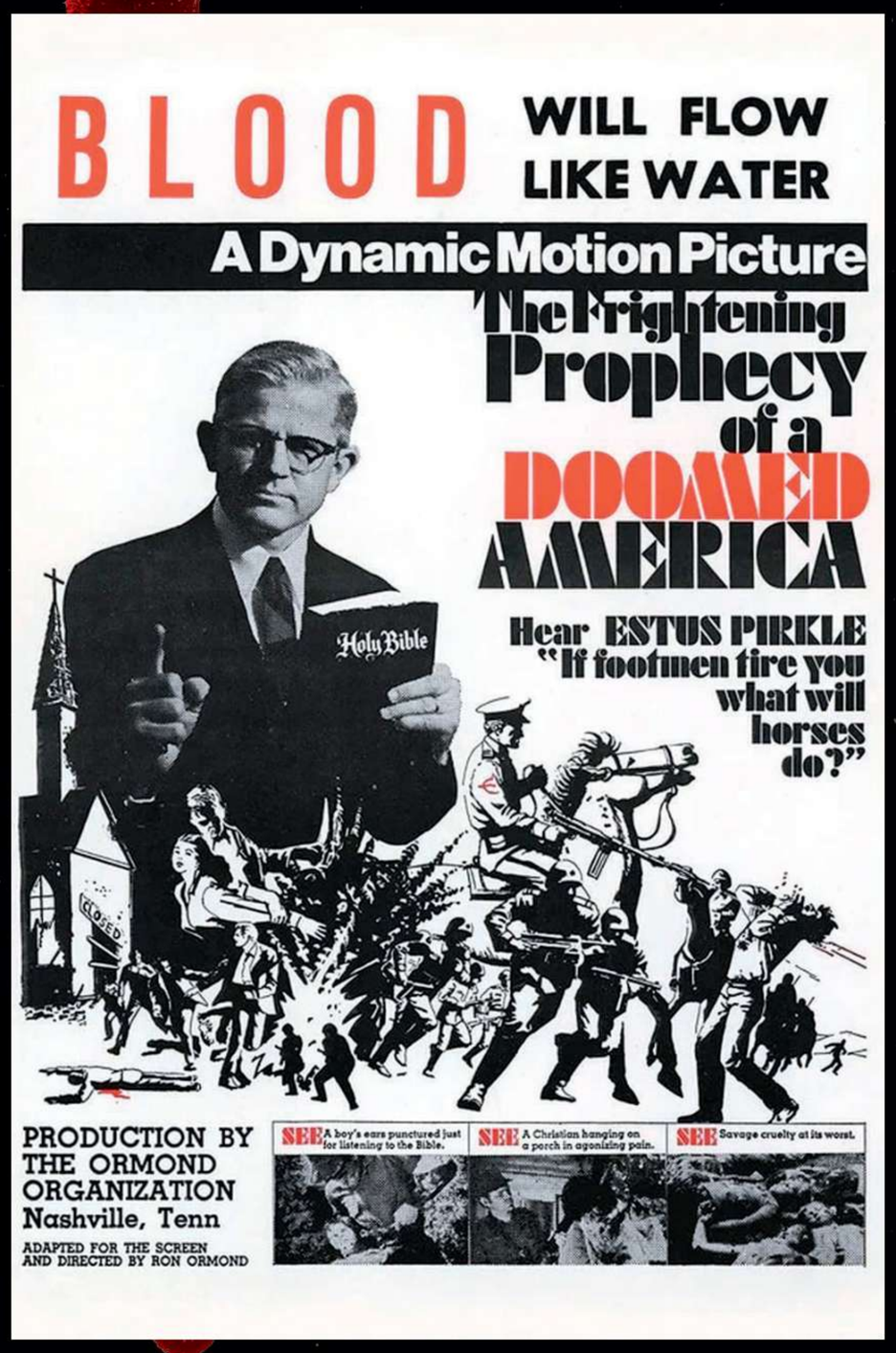
BIBLE STUDY CAN GET KIND OF INTENSE.



The Believer's Heaven offered scene after scene of salvation in the sky. As imagined by Ormond (informed by the literal word of God, the Bible), Heaven's interior design aesthetic is akin to the inside of a very clean refrigerator – white and frosty – while the exterior is a perfectly manicured golf course. Everyone wears white choir robes, exists in a body at its peak physical condition (regardless of how or when you died), and, as per Pirkle, lives in a gigantic mansion. Oh, and remember, if you're not in Heaven, you're burning in Hell, so get with the program, sinner.

Important context for these films, and especially *Footmen*, is that they were created to be shown in church to the *entire* congregation. While not made for children specifically, traumatizing them was the intention, a tactic to scare them to a life of Christ. *Footmen* and *The Burning Hell* would be firmly rated "R" today. And audiences ate them up – distributed almost exclusively directly to churches, with occasional drive-in screenings, all four Ormond soul-savers earned substantial returns on meager investments.

Though their tenure was brief, the Ormonds took Pirkle's sermons and carved out a new genre of the film so unique, few have tried to emulate it. Christploitation: shocking, violent, disturbing, and possibly effective – we can never know how many souls they saved – the imagery of these films burned into the memories of the unsuspecting, unprepared churchgoing audiences decades ago (including this writer) and remains there still. And for that we say – Praise be! 💀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Hear ESTUS PIRKLE "If footmen fire you what will horses do?"
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SEE A boy's ears punctured just for listening to the Bible.
SEE A Christian hanging on a porch in agonizing pain.
SEE Savage cruelty at its worst.

After *The Believer's Heaven*, Pirkle and the Ormonds would mutually agree to end their partnership. Ron Ormond would graduate to Heaven in 1981, with his last contribution to the genre being a co-writing credit on the science fiction-tinged *The Second Coming*, Tim's first film in the director's chair. Tim would make one more Christian film, *The Sacred Symbol*, then spend his next years on more secular projects. June would work with her son on these films as a producer and makeup artist before retiring a few years later. She passed in 2006. Pirkle's involvement in filmed entertainment ended with the Ormond trilogy, although he continued to preach and write books until his death in 2005.

LOVE WILL SLASH US APART

A CONVERSATION WITH *HEART EYES*' JOSH RUBEN, CHRISTOPHER LANDON, MICHAEL KENNEDY, AND PHILLIP MURPHY.

BY BJ COLANGELO

PICTURED HERE: OLIVIA HOLT AS ALLY (LEFT), MASON GOODING AS JAY (RIGHT), AND [REDACTED] AS THE HEART EYES KILLER (CENTER).

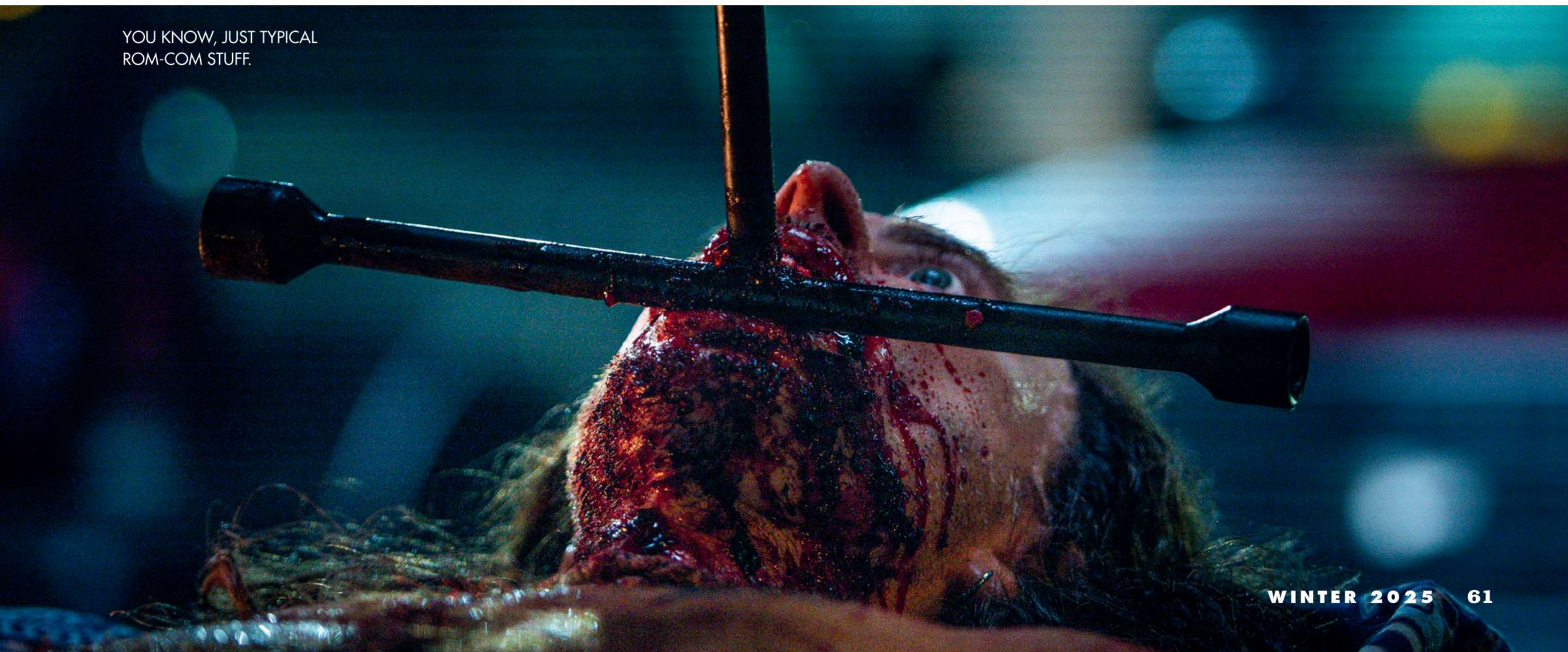
A silver lining of a bad date is that it can sometimes lead to a great story to tell at parties, but for screenwriter Phillip Murphy, a bad date inspired the upcoming slasher rom-com, *Heart Eyes*. After a fantastic chat on FaceTime with a girl he had met on an app, the pair set up to meet in person, "And then the date couldn't have gone any worse," he tells me. "It was like playing tennis with somebody, but there's nobody on the other end of the court." The date ended early, but Murphy started ruminating about what would have helped the two bond and translate the FaceTime energy to their date. Jokingly, he thought, "If there was a killer just chasing us, maybe that would've been the thing that would've brought us together and gotten back that kind of vibe that we had on the app."

As these thoughts of star-crossed lovers fighting for their lives against a killer swirled in his head, he kept coming back to a different slasher movie: *The Strangers: Prey at Night*. There was something about a family caught in a sinister situation "just getting mowed down" that he couldn't stop thinking about, remembering getting "caught in the feels" because of the '80s ballads that dominate the soundtrack. The script caught the attention of *Happy Death Day* maestro Christopher Landon, who brought in his *Freaky* co-writer Michael Kennedy to help the story find its final form.

For the past several years, the mysterious "Heart Eyes Killer" has wreaked havoc on Valentine's Day by stalking and murdering couples. Unfortunately for Ally (Olivia Holt) and Jay (Mason Gooding), two co-workers with electric chemistry who are mistaken for partners, they're thrust into a fight for survival against a masked killer who looks on through heart-shaped eyes.

"I really wanted to lean into the concept of making a violent and gory rom-com and lean into the tropes of both genres," says Landon. "I kind of felt like rejiggering things so that it was more of a classic rom-com setup where you have two adversarial people who work together and don't like each other." Landon loves that the rom-com elements feel very '90s, but he also wanted to channel the Goldie Hawn and Chevy Chase meet-cute-during-an-assassination-attempt flick, *Foul Play*. "I always try to find a fresh angle because, obviously, everything's been done before [...], and then of course, any excuse to write with Michael and do mean, funny and evil things together."

Kennedy saw *Heart Eyes* as the perfect opportunity for him and Landon to give the rom-com and the slasher a different spread through their voices, and thought that working on this project felt reminiscent of *Freaky* where they were telling a story that, from the outside, feels familiar, but is given a fresh facelift. The major difference, however, is that *Heart Eyes* is genuinely scary. "This is a little bit different from *Freaky* in that it's less tongue-in-cheek and it's more sincere with scares and leaning into the horror



YOU KNOW, JUST TYPICAL ROM-COM STUFF.

of dating and having a guy in a mask chasing you around town," Kennedy says. "It was another opportunity for us to work together and laugh and think of sick shit, but 95% of the really sick kills are Chris, so I'm going to blame him for it."

Heart Eyes doesn't hold back when it comes to the kills, including both elaborate set pieces that hearken to the glory days of the slasher's golden era, and unexpected jump scares guaranteed to shock the system. But the film's effectiveness is still grounded in the rom-com tropes that immediately make audiences fall in love with the characters. "That's one of the things that I think Josh has done so well here, is that while you have all these really heightened elements, it's still very much a character-driven movie," says Landon. "And I think that's key."

The slasher's mask was designed by special effects legend Tony Gardner, who has created everything from Chucky puppets, Daft Punk Robots, the undead creatures of *Zombieland*, the monstrous mutations of *Freaked*, and even the Geico Cavemen. But he's also worked on rom-coms like *Shallow Hal*, *There's Something About Mary*, and *13 Going on 30*. Murphy jokes that one of his original ideas for the mask was the face of Chuck Woolery, the original host of *Love Connection*, but eventually landed on twisting the heart eyes emoji into something diabolical. The mask marries slasher staples with BDSM aesthetics, and Ruben just ran with the idea and started pitching kills with bespoke weapons. "We needed to create an iconic villain that stands out in a very crowded world," Landon says, "And I feel like *Heart Eyes* does that."

Horror movies and rom-coms are typically viewed as the spectrum of "date night movies," so *Heart Eyes* is a bit of brilliance for merging the two. However, this specific combination of genre-mashing initially intimidated Ruben as a director, despite being known for directing the horror comedies *Scare Me* and *Werewolves Within*, not to mention his decades of comedy work through CollegeHumor and now Dropout. "As someone who loves genre-bending, I was like, 'This is scary and it's legitimately a rom-com,' I don't know, I just don't know," he says.

Kennedy told Ruben to "read it again," words Ruben says he's going to one day get tattooed on himself. "And I tapped into the part of myself that was like, 'Oh, I grew up loving *My Best Friend's Wedding*.'" Ruben's siblings introduced him to films like *Pretty Woman* and *Sleepless in Seattle*, and upon re-reading the script, he started remembering feeling deeply for these extremely flawed characters and realizing that "they did have a bit of darkness to them," he says. The character work is what helps *Heart Eyes* stand out, because like all the best slasher films, it's loaded with characters the audience actually cares about.

Ruben wanted to deliver Nora Ephron meets Wes Craven, playing with the rom-com tropes that have become the necessary ingredients to make the formula work, while also pulling influences from slasher films like *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives*. "It was an opportunity to scratch all the heartaches, but also tap into someone like the part of myself that I've kind of not forgotten about, but I am just not very public about," Ruben says. "I get all teary-eyed about Julia Roberts just as I get teary-eyed about *Jason Lives*, about Tommy's moment when that camper flips over," he says. "I kind of can't believe we got here, the amount of support that we got from the beginning to just take the swing and do the thing."

It's to the film's benefit that the *Heart Eyes* team is loaded with seasoned pros when it comes to genre-bending, and the fact that they're all legitimately funny people makes it an easy film to fall in love with. "I think there's a misconception about horror fans," Landon says. "When I meet people and they find out what I do for a living, they're always like, 'Oh, you must be so fucked up,' and I'm always like, 'No, actually horror people are the most well-adjusted, happy people on Earth,'" Landon says, laughing. "It's like the hardcore comedians that are fucked up." Landon admits that it's nice when horror films take the time to be a little sentimental, which opens the film up to a wider audience base than the usual hack-n-slash gorefests.

But the key to a good genre bend? It comes down to the characters. "If you have two leads who you genuinely like and genuinely care about, you'll go into

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MOSS • COURTESY OF SCREEN GEMS AND SPYGLASS MEDIA GROUP

any genre with them simultaneously," Landon explains. "And I think that's the key ingredient. It's just making sure that the audience is there with those people the whole time, and that you're playing their emotional stakes for real." Kennedy agrees, saying, "When the audience loves your main characters, it makes the funny stuff funnier, it makes the romantic stuff sweeter, and it makes the scares scarier." He continues, "The movie's really a scary ride and I don't think it would be as scary as it is A) without Josh's direction and B) without people liking Ally and Jay."

In typical rom-com format, Ally is our relatable endearing female protagonist who is a little mouthy and a little messy, which hopefully allows viewers to immediately identify with her journey. The character a mom would adore in a Hallmark movie but without the weird Christian overtones. Kennedy jokes that there are too many studio executives in the world who give up on a character in the first 30 pages of the script because a character seems "a little unlikable" and then it's up to the writers to remind them that audiences identify with the imperfection and, most importantly, "That's called a story arc."

Like comedy, the effectiveness of horror isn't just the visual element, but also the timing. Luckily, as anyone who has ever watched Josh Ruben on an episode of *Make Some Noise* can attest, few can hold a candle to his understanding of good timing. But he, like the rest of the creative team, operated under the collaborative belief that the best idea wins. "If your gaffer has an idea that might actually be a bit more eerie, you have to be embracing of it," Ruben says. He also credits editor Brett W. Bachman (*Vigil*, *Mandy*,

> "I really wanted to lean into the concept of making a violent and gory rom-com and lean into the tropes of both genres."
> – Christopher Landon

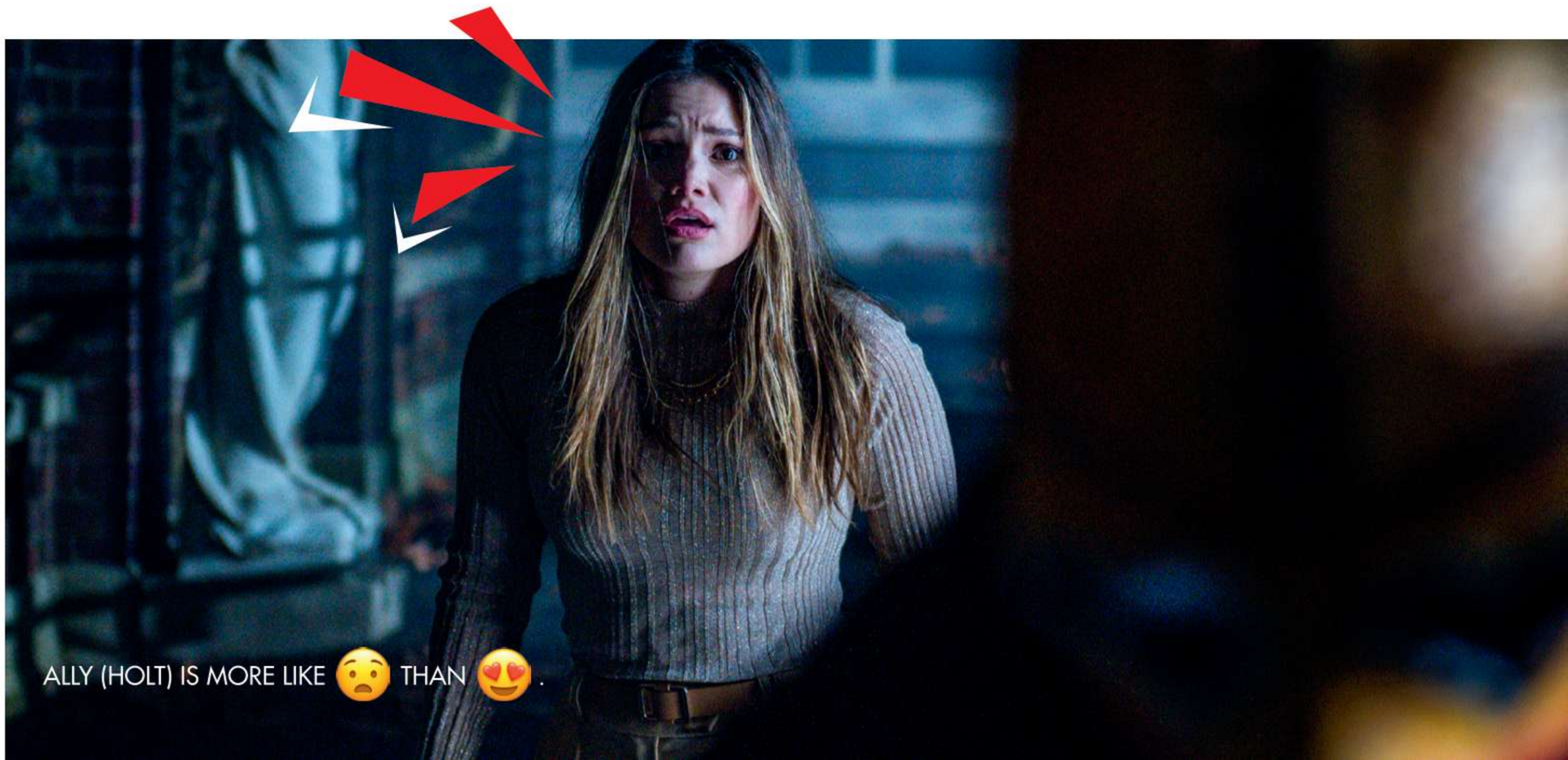
CHIEF HARTLEY (JAMES GAYLYN) WATCHES AS DETECTIVES HOBBS (DEVON SAWA) AND SHAW (JORDANA BREWSTER) EXAMINE A LOCK OF HAIR… AND ITS ATTACHED SCALP.

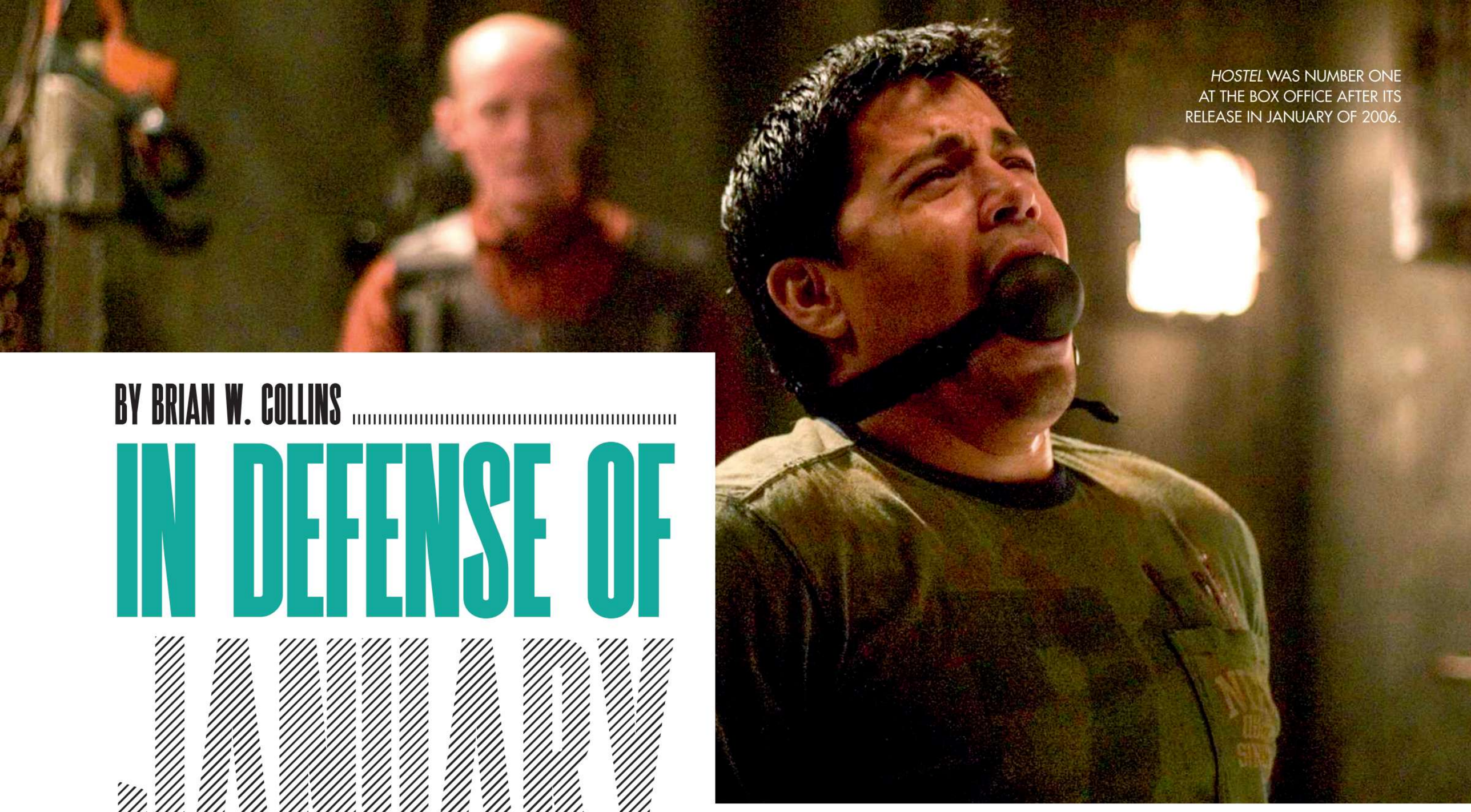
The Fall of the House of Usher, in conversation in this issue on page 24!) and lighting artist Stephen Murphy, who both helped craft the look of *Heart Eyes* by imbuing the film with a sense of dread throughout. If you've been sick of not being able to see a damn thing because every horror movie is underlit and too dark, may *Heart Eyes* light your way.

"I still get chills when I see a certain moment when a character arrives at a public event, and it's one of my most proud sequences because it's so reminiscent of all of the chills I got watching films," Reuben says. "I don't know, dare I say, *Jason Takes Manhattan* when you actually see the iconic character in the way it's supposed to have worked." Murphy says that *Heart Eyes* is what he had envisioned from day one, but that the trio of Ruben, Landon, and Kennedy elevated what he laid out with the original script. "I'm proud of what I did, and it's an honor to share the screen with these guys," he explains.

"Best idea always wins is usually the best way to go and it's really, really pushed this movie to a new level," Kennedy says. "I've worked on films where that's not been the case, and the movie doesn't turn out to be a very good film because you have either too many cooks who think they're the head chef or someone who cuts the head chef off at the knees and doesn't give them any ingredients to work with." *Heart Eyes* didn't have any of those issues behind the scenes, and the result is a slasher that's as sweet as it is scary. "Every time I watch it, I'm like a kid at Christmas because I get to see the audience react and hear them gasp," says Kennedy. "I want to play in this sandbox again, quite frankly, and I want people to walk out and go, 'That was fucking fun.'"

"Seeing it twice in a crowded theater, it makes it that much better," Ruben says. "It makes it that much scarier. It makes it that much funnier." *Heart Eyes* is a movie for folks who hate romance and want to see couples getting decimated so they can revel in the kills, while leaving room for romantics who want to see love conquer all and still go on a thrill ride. "This is the perfect date night movie," Ruben says, but he's hoping it's the kind of movie that inspires fans to watch in a big group. "That's the kind of stuff I love to make, and I hope they love it." *Heart Eyes* arrives in theaters just in time for Valentine's Day on February 7, 2025. 💀





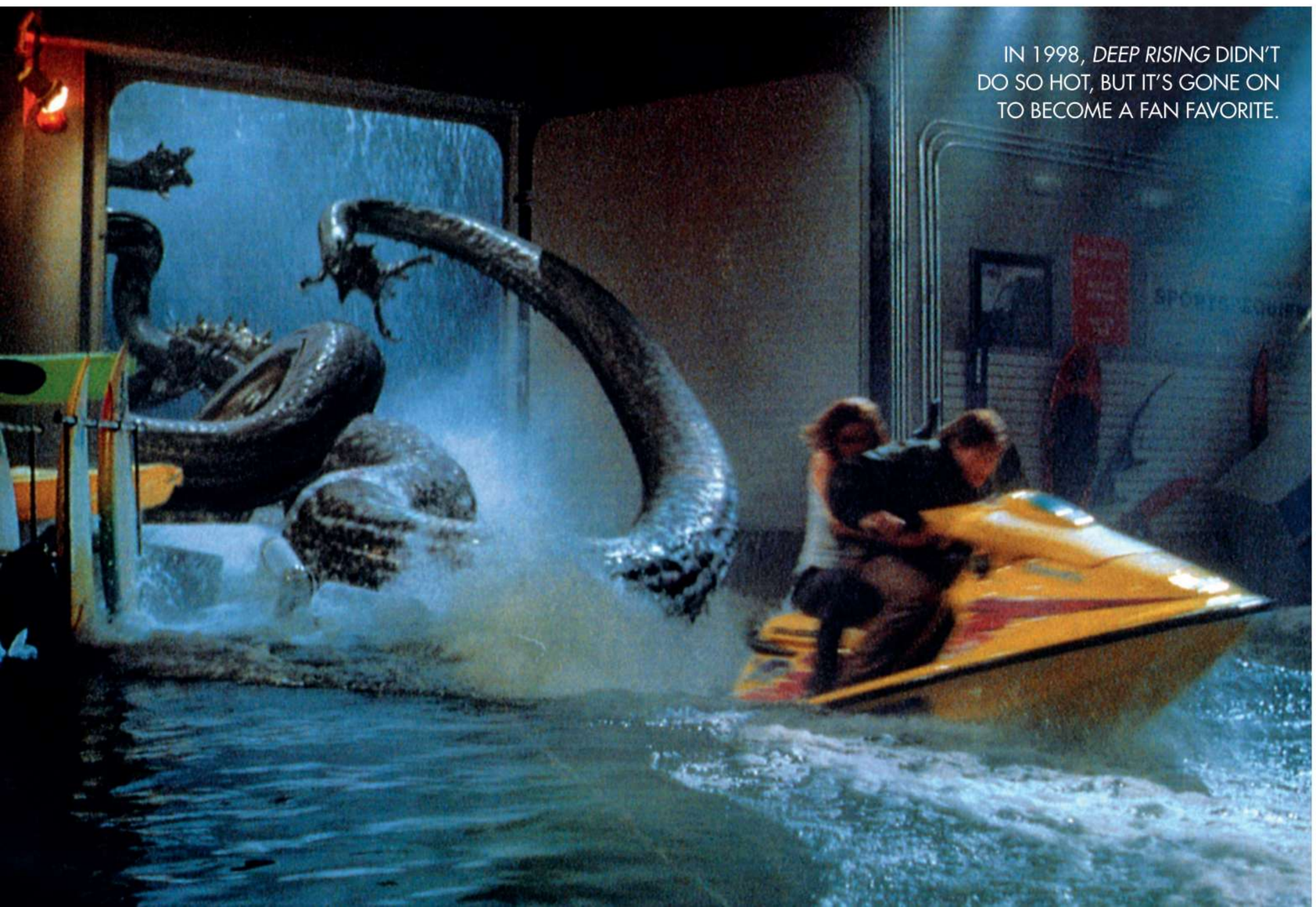
HOSTEL WAS NUMBER ONE AT THE BOX OFFICE AFTER ITS RELEASE IN JANUARY OF 2006.

BY BRIAN W. COLLINS

IN DEFENSE OF JANUARY HORROR

RETHINKING OUR RELEASE-DATE BIASES.

As of this writing, *Companion*, produced by the *Barbarian* team and starring Sophie Thatcher and Jack Quaid, will be hitting theaters on January 10th. A week later, Leigh Whannell returns to the Universal Monster stable with his update on *The Wolf Man*. And so, barring the unlikely event that both get delayed, this means that one of the genre's grand traditions will remain intact: a new year equates to new big-screen horror. Rare are the years that the major studios don't give us something scary (2001 was the furthest back I found), and many years have given us more than one option. It's a comfort, especially after the usually barren November and December slates.



IN 1998, *DEEP RISING* DIDN'T DO SO HOT, BUT IT'S GONE ON TO BECOME A FAN FAVORITE.

It's not hard to understand why the studios habitually mark this time of the year as an easy place to slot in some fright fare. Horror films are, on average, cheaper to make than those in other genres, and January is traditionally a slower moviegoing month in general. Not only is all the focus on the holiday season's awards bait (a group that will certainly lack in genre options), but also on New Year's resolutions to get in shape or start saving for a house – all of which take precedence over heading to the multiplex as often, and folks don't start slacking on those promises until the spring. It's just effective counter programming across the board to release a cheap horror flick for the hardcore theatergoers.

PARAMOUNT SURPRISED AUDIENCES WITH *CLOVERFIELD* IN 2008 AFTER A SECRETIVE MARKETING CAMPAIGN.

ALMOST ALL OF THE *UNDERWORLD* FILMS HAVE HAD JANUARY RELEASES.

As a result, the phrase "dumping ground" gets tossed around a lot when we refer to these annual early releases, but the term has become increasingly outdated and just plain inaccurate. Yes, it used to be the time of the year when studios would shrug off a troubled production just to squeeze whatever box office they could get out of something fans knew not to show up for (*Virus*, for example, which its own star was already disowning by the time it hit in January 1999), but even in the '90s, a number of fan favorites got the early year slot. Cult gems like *From Dusk Till Dawn* and *Deep Rising*, plus now-certified classics like *Demon Knight* and *Tremors*, were all January releases that no self-respecting fan would place alongside the likes of *Phantoms*.

Throughout the '00s, we saw fewer of those "dumped" movies and more titles that maybe just didn't fit into traditional boxes, like the true-story based creeper *The Mothman Prophecies* and Eli Roth's trend-setting *Hostel*. Sure, we still got the likes of *Darkness Falls* and *White Noise*, but even those films offered a certain charm that, honestly, we could use more of today: B-movies with A-list actors (indeed, *White Noise* provided Michael Keaton with his first hit in over a decade) and/or impressive production value to go along with their relatively silly stories.

It's also a time to take big swings, with less pressure on their connecting. In 2008, Paramount attempted something akin to a secret movie entirely, withholding the title of *Cloverfield* until two months before release, and still giving precious little information as to what "it" was. The gamble paid off, launching the career of Matt Reeves and providing the then-dormant "found footage" sub-genre with a shot in the arm after a long absence from the multiplexes. That this and the other previously mentioned films were mostly original, and not remakes or adaptations of lesser-known comic books, is also something to consider and appreciate.

Not that the month traditionally lacks franchise options, either. While the first *Underworld* was released in September 2003, all its sequels hit in January, two of which outgrossed the original, with the prequel entry *Rise of the Lycans* still coming close to those

TEXAS CHAINSAW 3D DID ITS THING (CUZ) IN JANUARY 2013.

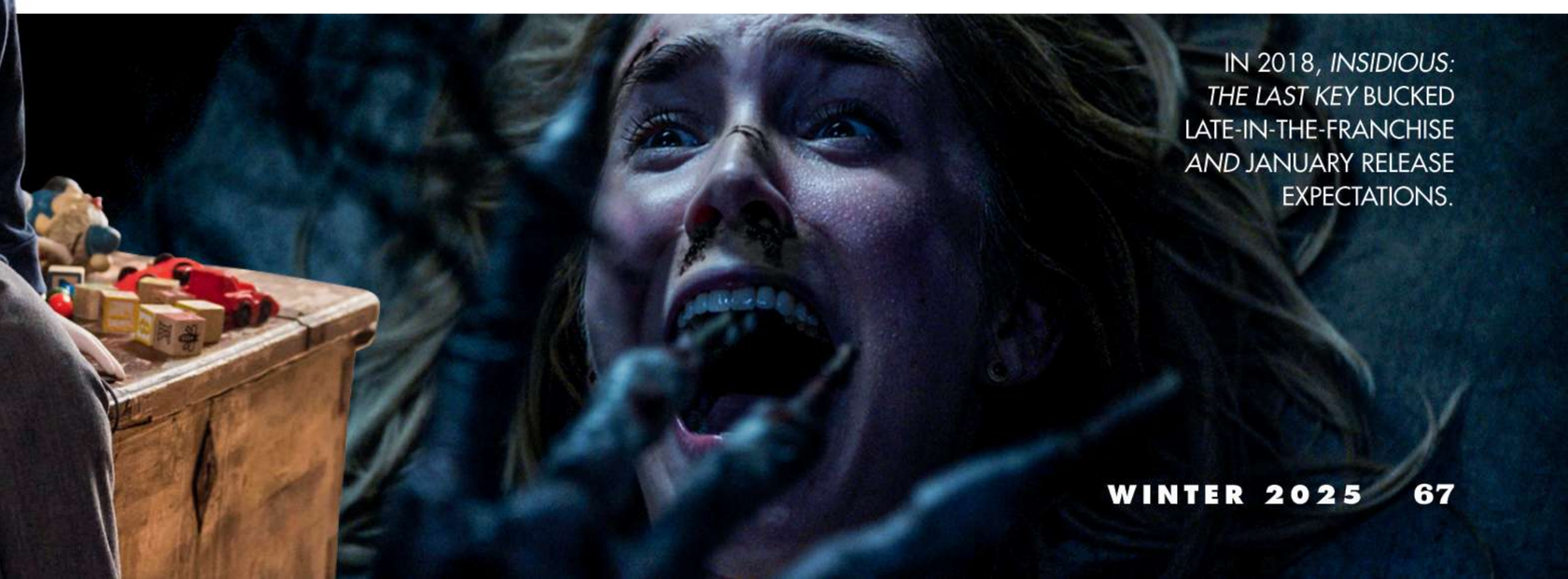
numbers despite the absence of star Kate Beckinsale. *Texas Chainsaw 3D* may not be everyone's favorite sequel in the series, but it still gave us plenty to enjoy, with three classic cast members returning and one of this wacky franchise's most enduring bits of dialogue ("Do your thing, Cuz!"). And the *Final Destination* series has moved all over the calendar, but considering how often people post memes about logging trucks as opposed to roller coasters or airplanes, it's safe to say that *Final Destination 2* (released January of 2003) struck the biggest chord with audiences in terms of longevity.

Not all of those films broke box office records, but again, this is a time of the year when audiences aren't exactly packing the multiplexes. And yet, over the past few years, it's become a fairly lucrative time to release a genre film. *M3gan*, *Split* (and its less-loved but still successful follow-up, *Glass*), *Scream* (2022), and *Escape Room* not only made lots of money but also won over a decent chunk of the moviegoers who paid to see them. 2018's *Insidious: The Last Key* actually outgrossed the previous entry in the franchise; mighty impressive considering that original creators James Wan and Leigh Whannell had moved on by then. Even the occasional modern box office dud, like *Underwater*, is much loved by those who managed to see it.

In fact, going back a decade, it was easier to find movies that were hits or well-liked, or both, than it was to find the types of films we would expect from the derogatory "January Horror" crowd. This doesn't exactly signify a trend – I could go back the same amount of time for every other month and find just as many movies we'd like to forget ever happened, if not more. But again, even those less-beloved films often have their charms. Is *The Boy* an all-time classic of the genre? No. Is it a fun flick that gave us a memorable mini icon in Brahms and a solid twist? Absolutely. (And, not for nothing, but it's much better than its sequel, released in February, naturally.)

So I say it's high time to change the preconception of January Horror. No longer should it suggest that something is "less than." Instead, we should look forward to what sort of surprises we may find in the new year. There will always be a stinker or two, just as in any other month, but if a repertory theater were to program a "Released in January" festival of genre selections from the past decade or so, it would be a big-ticket event for sure. And given the track record of those involved, there's a good chance *The Wolf Man* and *Companion* will fit comfortably among the best the month has provided in the past, and further prove that nowadays, being a January horror movie is less of a red flag and more of a potential badge of honor.

THE BOY OFFERED US SOME CAMP AND AN ICONIC NEW VILLAIN IN 2016.



IN 2018, *INSIDIOUS: THE LAST KEY* BUCKED LATE-IN-THE-FRANCHISE *AND* JANUARY RELEASE EXPECTATIONS.

THE CREATORS OF *FERAL* HONORED CLASSIC HORROR MOVIE MOMENTS AND POSTERS WITH THEIR COMIC COVERS – THERE'S EVEN A FANGO HOMAGE!

GOING FERAL

BY DANIEL MCMAHON-YOUNG

WE SPEAK WITH CREATORS TONY FLEECS, TRISH FORSTNER AND BRAD SIMPSON ABOUT THEIR NEW HORROR COMIC.

There are few comics that leap from the shelves like those from Tony Fleecs and Trish Forstner. With their first book, *Stray Dogs*, they explored horror through the eyes of dogs. Their newest title, *Feral*, tells a story of survival from the perspective of cats. Both feature a series of covers honoring classic horror films. *Feral* even features a variant cover that plays on FANGORIA itself. We spoke with the creative team – Fleecs, Forstner and colorist Brad Simpson – about their approach to animal storytelling, their homage variant covers, and more.

Feral seems like a sequel to your first co-creation, _Stray Dogs_. With this title having its focus on cats, what kind of creative avenues could you explore with a cat versus with a dog?

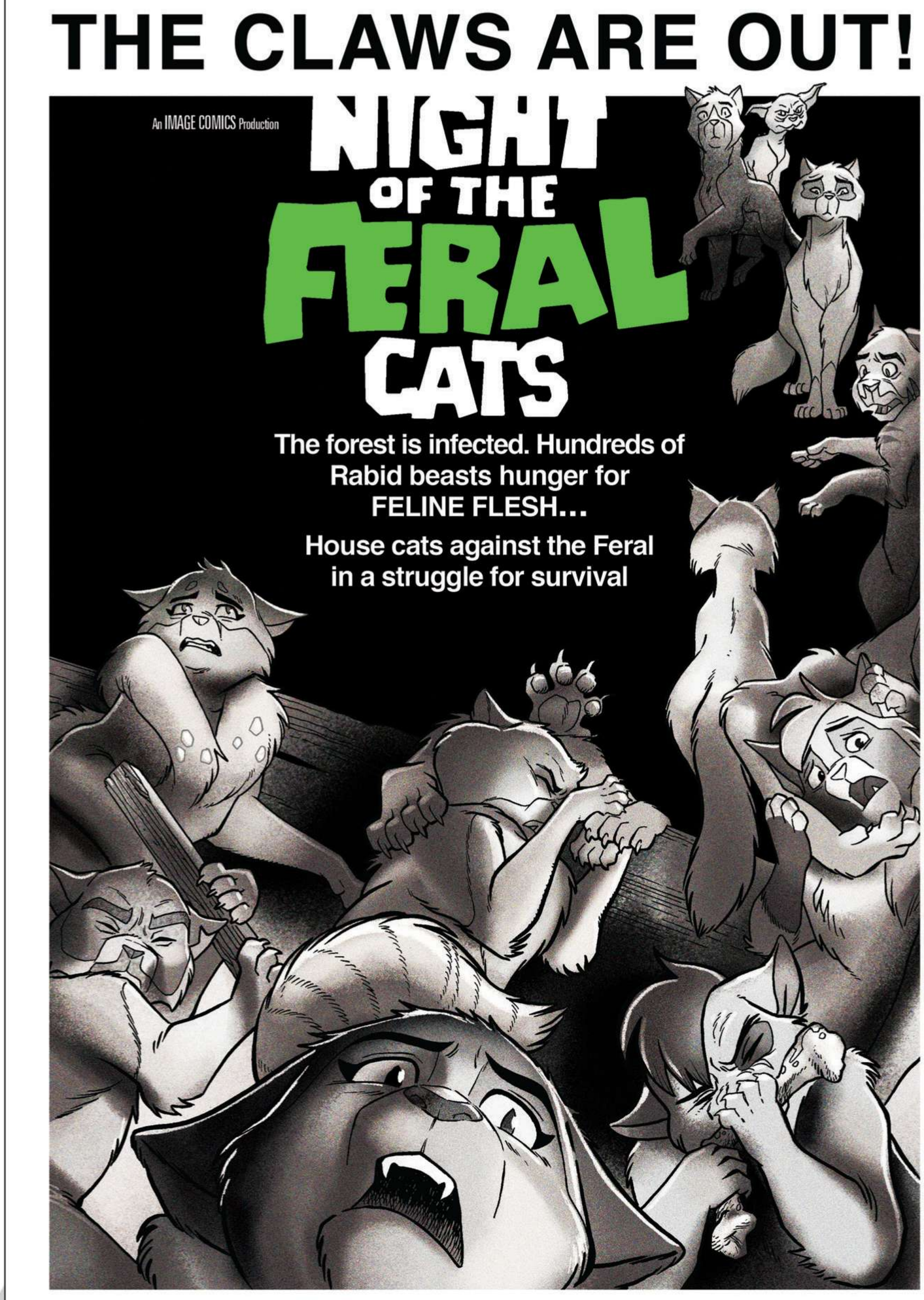
We sort of designed *Feral* to have the same vibe as *Stray Dogs*, but we wanted – beyond being the same cute animal horror/petsploitation genre, for them to be completely different. And part of that just came from looking at the differences between cats and dogs. Cats are a little sharper and meaner. They have razor-sharp claws. Dogs know they need their owners to survive; cats feel like they'd figure it out and be just fine without us. Dogs seem to have a short memory, cats can hold a grudge. Just those differences sort of set up a lot of the tone of the book. More violent. A much more open world: the stray dogs were trapped in a serial killer's house. These cats can go anywhere.

Where did the premise for _Feral_ start?

After we finished *Stray Dogs*, we knew we wanted to do something with cats. We wanted it to be different. It took a long time to land on rabies that works like a zombie outbreak for cats. Once we landed on that, everything came together. A lot of it was just taking what we'd done in *Stray Dogs* and doing the opposite. So: *Stray Dogs* is all in one house; this one's wide open. The cats can go anywhere. *Stray Dogs* had one villain; here, everyone they meet is trying to kill them. I thought a lot about my favorite zombie/infected stories. Rewatched *The Crazies* and the Romero trilogy. I read a bunch of rabies fiction and nonfiction. And I just started thinking about what kind of characters would be most interesting to follow. There are these characters you see over and over again in zombie stuff: shell-shocked person, the 'lock it down' guy, the wildcard, the person that's too scared to make a break for it...

What's it like as storytellers to work from a much more literal, closer to the ground POV?

That's sort of the key to the whole thing. When I had the idea for *Stray Dogs*, it was just about a killer who murders people and takes their dogs. That wasn't really that interesting to me until I figured out, 'Oh! But it's like


THE CLAWS ARE OUT!
An IMAGE COMICS Production
NIGHT OF THE FERAL CATS
The forest is infected. Hundreds of Rabid beasts hunger for FELINE FLESH...
House cats against the Feral in a struggle for survival
A comic by TONY FLEECS • TRISH FORSTNER • TONE RODRIGUEZ • BRAD SIMPSON • DENNIS CULVER • LAUREN HERDA
Special magic effects by SARA RICHARD • For Image Comics: Eric Stephenson • Todd McFarlane • Jim Valentino • Marc Silvestri • Erik Larsen • Robert Kirkman
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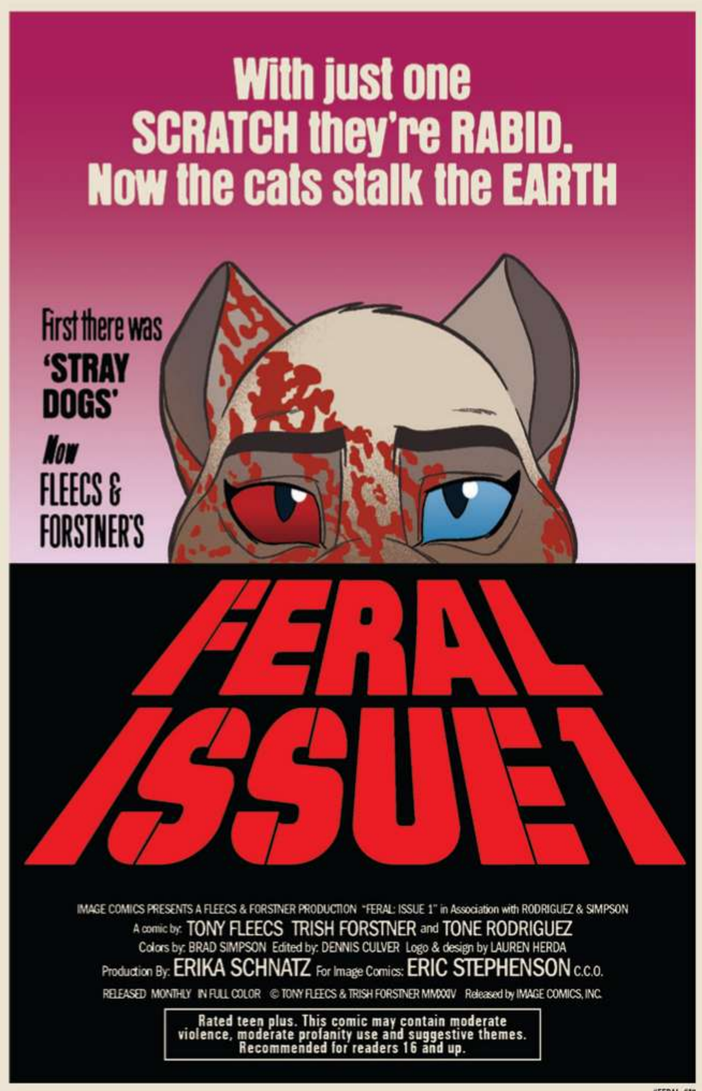
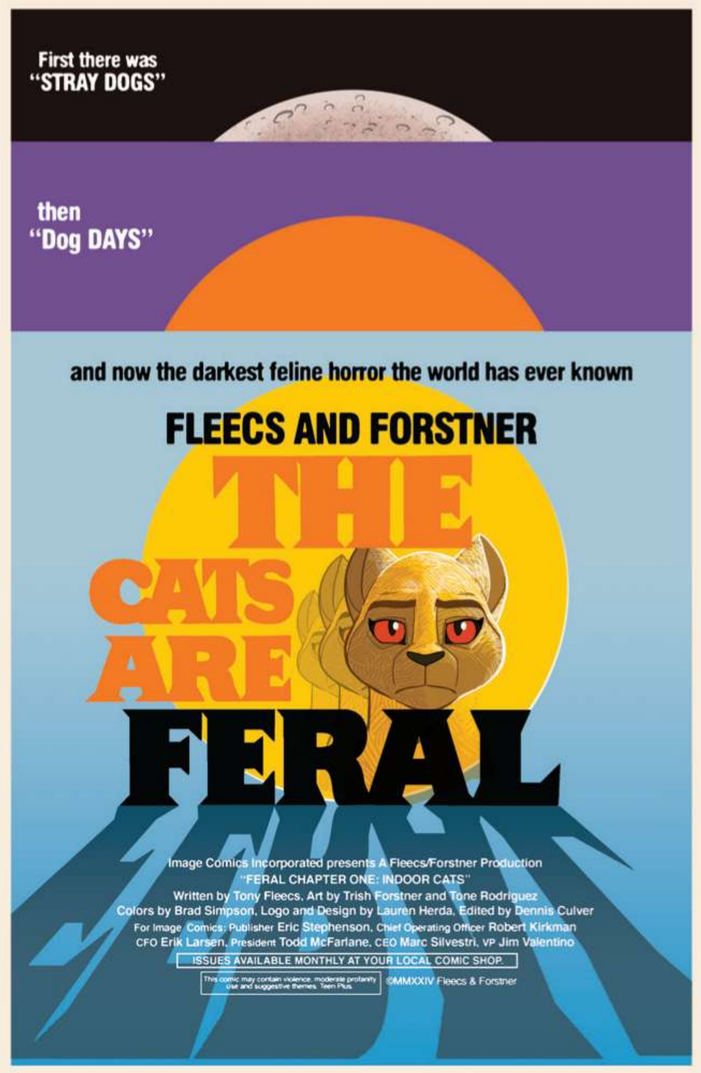

With just one SCRATCH they're RABID. Now the cats stalk the EARTH
First there was 'STRAY DOGS' Now FLEECS & FORSTNER'S
FERAL ISSUE 1
IMAGE COMICS PRESENTS A FLEECS & FORSTNER PRODUCTION "FERAL: ISSUE 1" in Association with RODRIGUEZ & SIMPSON
A comic by: TONY FLEECS TRISH FORSTNER and TONE RODRIGUEZ
Colors by: BRAD SIMPSON Edited by: DENNIS CULVER Logo & design by LAUREN HERDA
Production By: ERIKA SCHNATZ For Image Comics: ERIC STEPHENSON C.C.O.
RELEASED MONTHLY IN FULL COLOR © TONY FLEECS & TRISH FORSTNER MMXXIV Released by IMAGE COMICS, INC.
Rated teen plus. This comic may contain moderate violence, moderate profanity use and suggestive themes. Recommended for readers 16 and up.
"FERAL #1"


First there was "STRAY DOGS"
then "Dog DAYS"
and now the darkest feline horror the world has ever known
FLEECS AND FORSTNER
THE CATS ARE FERAL
Image Comics Incorporated presents A Fleecs/Forstner Production
"FERAL CHAPTER ONE: INDOOR CATS"
Written by Tony Fleecs. Art by Trish Forstner and Tone Rodriguez
Colors by Brad Simpson. Logo and Design by Lauren Herda. Edited by Dennis Culver
For Image Comics: Publisher Eric Stephenson, Chief Operating Officer Robert Kirkman
CFO Erik Larsen, President Todd McFarlane, CEO Marc Silvestri, VP Jim Valentino
ISSUES AVAILABLE MONTHLY AT YOUR LOCAL COMIC SHOP.
This comic may contain violence, moderate profanity use and suggestive themes. Teen Plus.
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Oliver & Company!' Then you get stuff like, even just a closed door is a huge obstacle because... they don't have thumbs. Or, they want to run away but they've been conditioned to respond when their master tells them to heel.

All of that stuff, I didn't really come to on my own. I worked as an artist on the *My Little Pony* comics for years. That's where I really started thinking about switching around points of view. What's this story like if it's a pony? Or a cat? Or a bunny?

What is it about the POV of animals that makes it such an interesting horror storytelling device?

You want the reader to be able to identify, and pets offer this seemingly really familiar perspective. We live with cats and dogs in our house. We think about what they're thinking about. Everybody has a voice they do for their dog.

These animals can be totally vulnerable without seeming weak. If a character in a slasher movie can't open an unlocked door, we start to care less if they get killed. If a dog can't open a door, we're terrified for them. How are they going to get out?! There are a ton of everyday situations that become much scarier if you can't open doors.

The series has had a number of incredible horror homage covers, with the likes of *Mandy*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *IT*, and so many more. What's your process for picking films?

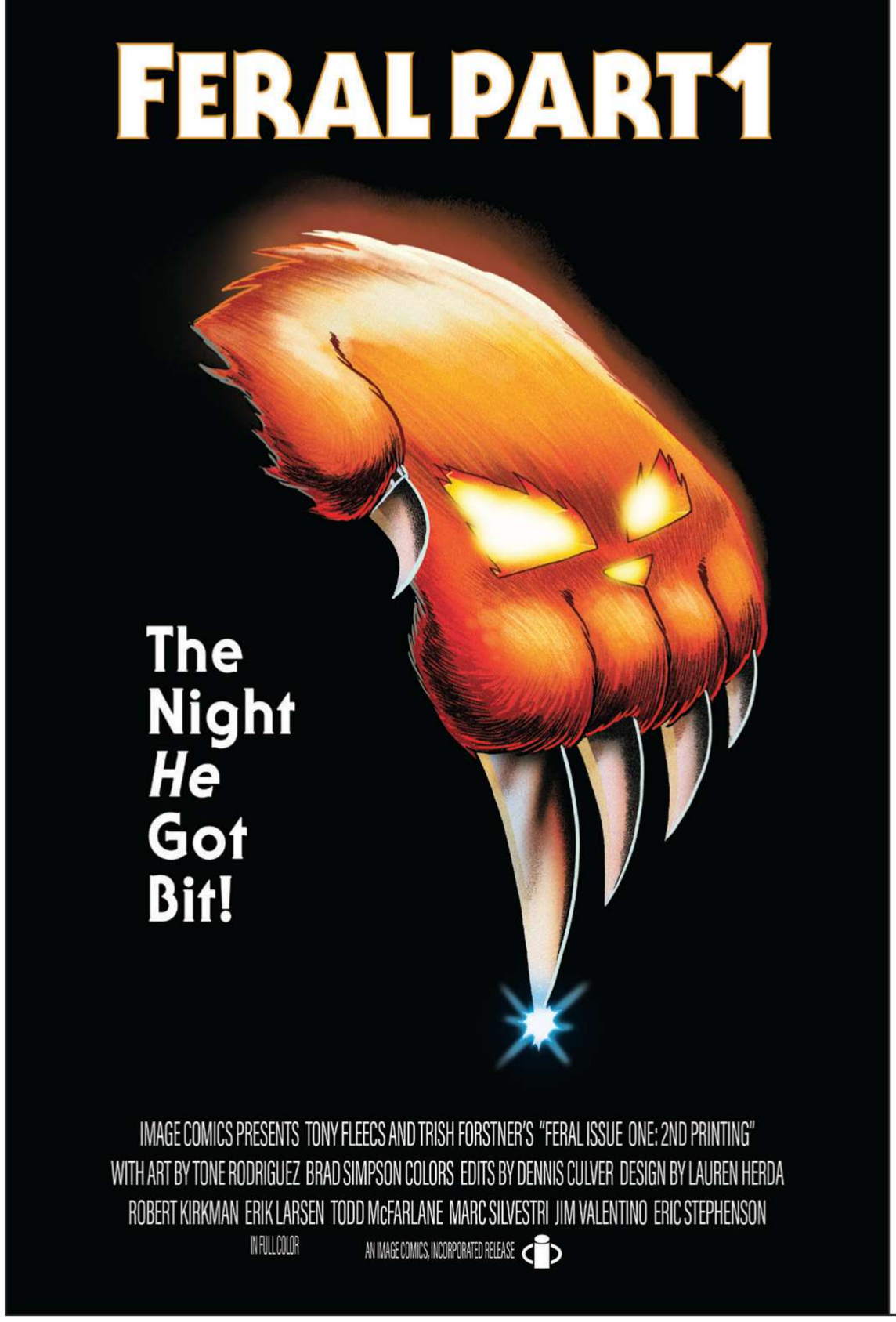
I just pick movies that I like most of the time. I'll send Trish a poster – she'll replace all the people with cats and then I'll ink it, color it, and design it. The hardest part is figuring out what to do if someone's holding a knife or a chainsaw or something. That's why there hasn't been a *Texas Chain Saw* cover. That part takes some creativity – how do you make these people-centric images cat-centric? My favorite solution was the *Halloween cover*. I said there was no way to cat-ify that jack-o-lantern and Trish sent over this sketch of a cat's paw that was just perfect. Um, I mean PURRFECT.

For Issue 10, one of the variants is a direct reference to FANGORIA itself! What made you want to homage the magazine with the book?

1. We're running out of horror posters.
2. I love FANGORIA. I'm a subscriber. I used to sneak peeks at it in convenience stores like it was *Hustler* or something. That masthead is just as iconic as some of these posters. People just see it and they immediately know there's going to be something creepy inside.

Your animals, Trish, have this extremely vibrant design scheme to them that is reminiscent of classic animal movies. What were some of your influences on the book?

Funnily enough, my biggest influence in art is Don Bluth and animated films in the '80s/'90s. Don Bluth's animation is known for bright, beautiful, animated stories, often with deeper, darker undertones.


FERAL PART 1
The Night He Got Bit!
IMAGE COMICS PRESENTS TONY FLEECS AND TRISH FORSTNER'S "FERAL ISSUE ONE: 2ND PRINTING"
WITH ART BY TONE RODRIGUEZ BRAD SIMPSON COLORS EDITS BY DENNIS CULVER DESIGN BY LAUREN HERDA
ROBERT KIRKMAN ERIK LARSEN TODD McFARLANE MARC SILVESTRI JIM VALENTINO ERIC STEPHENSON
IN FULL COLOR
AN IMAGE COMICS, INCORPORATED RELEASE

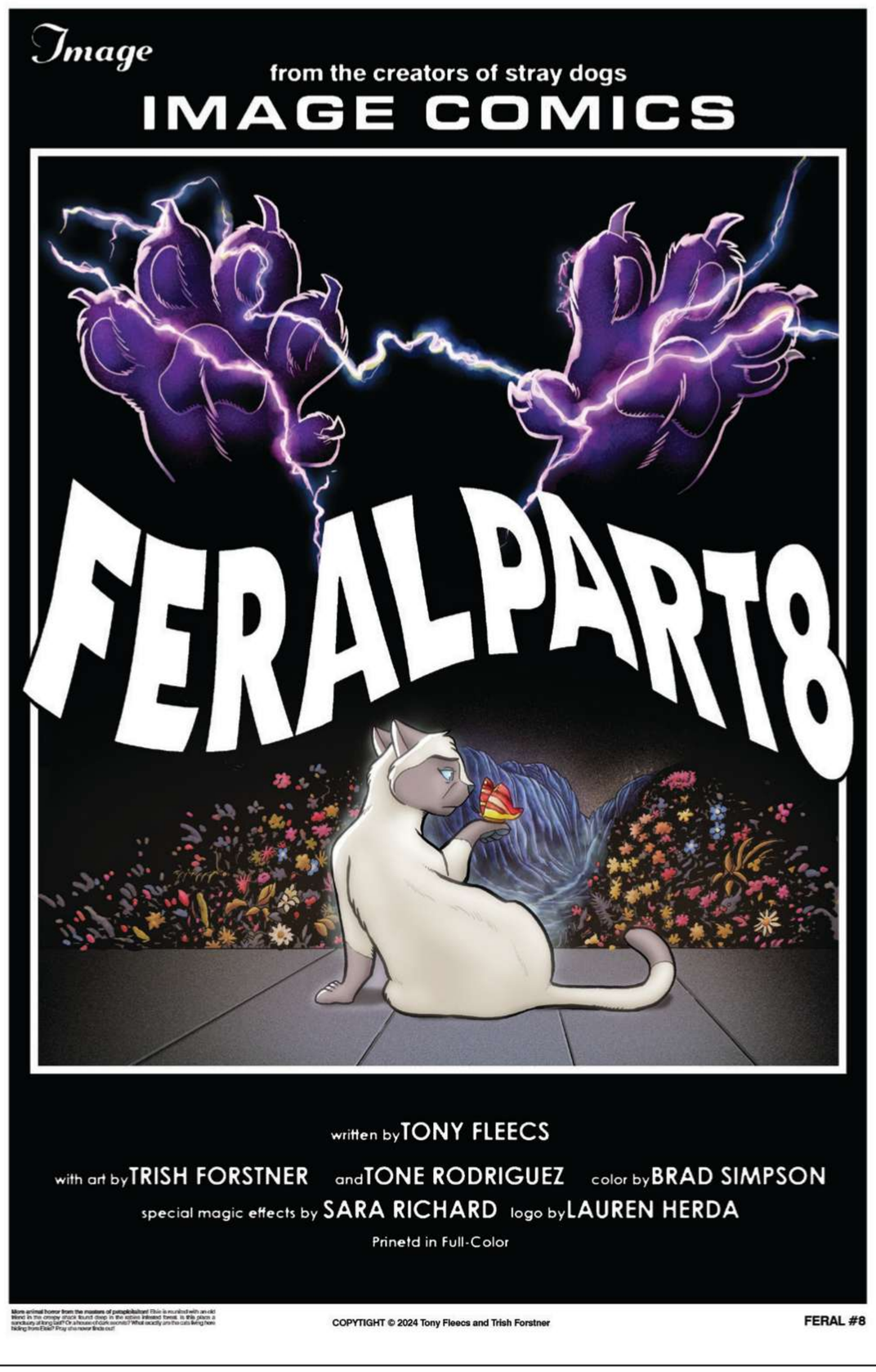
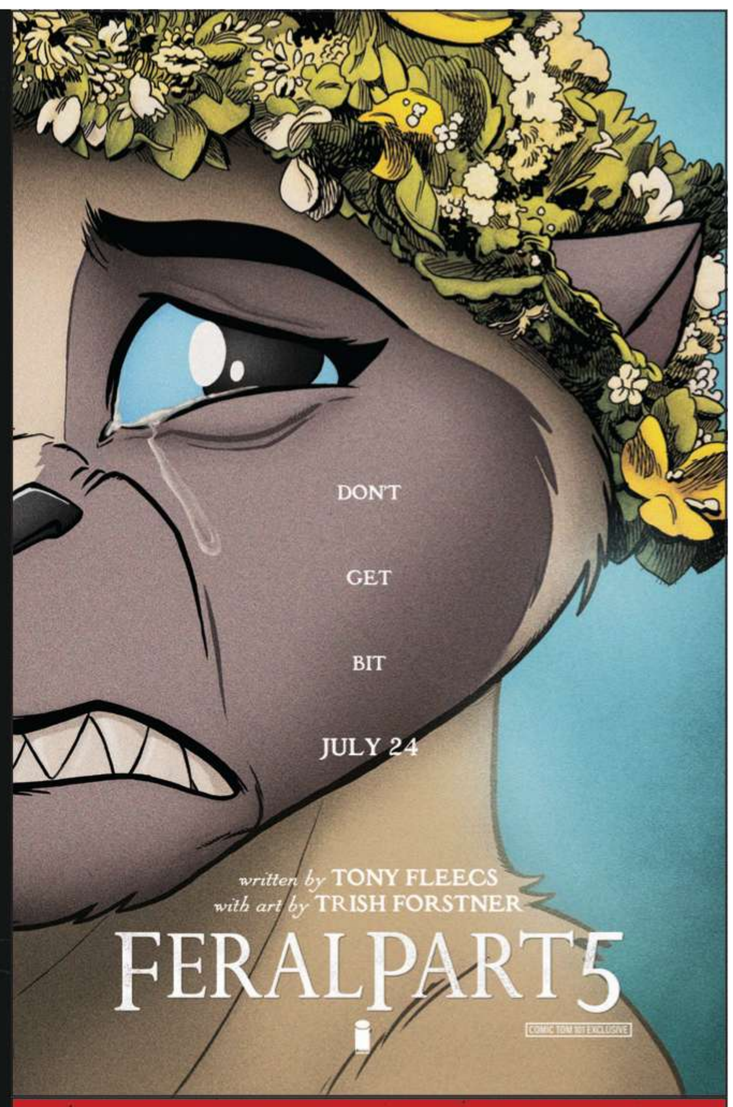


Image
from the creators of stray dogs
IMAGE COMICS
FERAL PART 8
written by TONY FLEECS
with art by TRISH FORSTNER and TONE RODRIGUEZ color by BRAD SIMPSON
special magic effects by SARA RICHARD logo by LAUREN HERDA
Prinetd in Full-Color
COPYTIGHT © 2024 Tony Fleecs and Trish Forstner
FERAL #8



FROM THE CREATORS OF STRAY DOGS AND THE PUBLISHER WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WALKING DEAD
TONY FLEECS
TRISH FORSTNER
TONE RODRIGUEZ
FERAL PART 6
IN COMIC STORES
SEPTEMBER 25

FROM STRAY DOGS CREATORS TONY FLEECS AND TRISH FORSTNER
THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT
FERAL
ISSUE 3 IN STORES MAY 22

The style of movies like *The Secret of NIMH* and *All Dogs Go To Heaven* depicted sweet and loveable characters enduring really heavy stories. My favorite part of the process is making the characters come to life on the panel, making the reader feel what the cats are feeling. Through *Stray Dogs* and *Feral* we wanted the stories to feel like you could see them in motion. Part of getting the viewer to go along with that is to create believable characters. I've always tried to illustrate characters with heart and emotion.

And Brad, with *Feral* having a few distinct art styles, how did you build your color palettes to match the scenes you were working on? Were there any challenges for you as a colorist?

The color approach was similar to our first book *Stray Dogs*, an aesthetic based on a classic animation style. The backgrounds are highly rendered, full of grit and grime, while the character work is flat and stylized. The main challenge with *Feral*, in particular, has been finding new ways to elevate the shocking moments. Sometimes it's a wash of vibrant red or a sickly green, whatever we can do to convey the horror and peril experienced by our feline characters. 💀

Joko Anwar takes us through one of horror's most exciting new movements.

The INDONESIAN BO

By Simon Abrams

Since 2017, some of the best new horror movies have been produced by and exported from Indonesia. At first, it seemed like one filmmaker was responsible for the country's new horror renaissance. No small feat for writer/director Joko Anwar, who surpassed the crossover success of his 2017 remake *Satan's Slaves* with a string of increasingly ambitious and well-made horror features like *Impetigore*, Indonesia's official submission for the 2021 American Academy Awards for Best International Feature Film, as well as last year's unnerving religious-themed horror drama *Grave Torture* and the sci-fi/horror anthology series *Joko Anwar's Nightmares and Daydreams* (both currently on Netflix).

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: KIMO STAMBOEL'S *DANCING VILLAGE: THE CURSE BEGINS*, JOKO ANWAR'S *SATAN'S SLAVES 2: COMMUNION*, AND ANWAR'S *IMPETIGORE*.

LUNA MAYA IN *SUZZANNA: BURIED ALIVE*.

HORROR ON

Anwar's various projects have also opened doors for a glut of atmospheric and genuinely exciting recent titles, many of which can be streamed on platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Shudder. Highlights from last year include Yongki Ongestu's parenthood chiller *Kuyang*, Anggy Umbara's Muslim-themed live-action Chick tract *Siksa Neraka* (or: *Hell Torture*), and Hanung Bramantyo's haunted plantation thriller *Trinil*, all three of which are on Netflix.

Now horror's not a "lesser genre" in Indonesia, in Anwar's words, and it's thanks in no small part to the attention and quality that he's brought to the genre. Before making movies, Anwar served as a film critic at the *Jakarta Post* from 2000-2005. During this post-New-Order/Reformation period, Indonesian film producers cranked out horror programmers aimed primarily at teenagers, several of which cribbed tropes and other stylistic hallmarks from popular Asian horror titles like *The Eye*, *Ju-On: The Grudge*, and *Shutter*. Since then, new Indonesian horror movies have only gotten more impressive now that they're less beholden to pre-existing trends.

Case in point: since 2022, Anwar's projects have all been produced by his own Come and See Pictures studio. He still credits streamers like Netflix Indonesia for giving him a level of creative freedom that was previously unimaginable. That's especially true of *Nightmares and Daydreams*, a multi-tentacled genre hybrid whose fourth episode, about a fisherman who believes he's been visited by a UFO/angel, is one of last year's best horror dramas.

"[*Nightmares and Dreamscapes*] would never draw an audience if you released it in the cinema because science-fiction is not close to our society, so it would be very hard to sell it," Anwar says. "Even if I made it under my own company, I would

JOKO ANWAR'S NIGHTMARES AND DAYDREAMS IS A STANDOUT SCI-FI/HORROR ANTHOLOGY HYBRID.

PHOTOS COURTESY MD PICTURES, RAPI FILMS, SHUDDER, AND NETFLIX

ANGGY UMBARA'S *SIKSA NERAKA* (*HELL TORTURE*) WAS A HIGHLIGHT FROM 2023.

be scared to release it because I don't think it will get a big enough audience to break even."

Anwar's successes have also proven that, while nostalgia remains a universal selling point for new horror, there's always room for experimentation in sequels and remakes. *Satan's Slaves 2: Communion*, Anwar's creepy and very entertaining follow-up to *Satan's Slaves*, was the first Indonesian movie to be shot with IMAX-approved cameras.

This year, director Kimo Stamboel also used IMAX-approved cameras to shoot *Dancing Village: The Curse Begins*, a 2022 prequel to the popular *Midsommar*-esque *Dancing Village*. Stamboel, formerly one half of the Mo Brothers along with *The Night Comes for Us* director Timo Tjahjanto, also followed Anwar's example by remaking a 1981 classic of New Order-era Indonesian horror, *The Queen of Black Magic*, starring horror icon Suzzanna.

Some blasts from the past have fared better with contemporary Indonesian audiences than others. For example, *Para Betina Pengikut Iblis* director Rako Prijanto's *Bayi Ajaib* (aka: *Miracle Baby*), a compelling 2023 remake of the lurid Satanic Panic-adjacent pregnancy psychodrama, was not a box office hit. (Anwar speculates that younger viewers weren't as familiar with the original movie.)

Other new remakes rely explicitly on moviegoers' familiarity with genre milestones like *Suzzanna: Buried Alive*, the award-winning 2018 remake of the Suzzanna-led 1981 rape-revenge chiller *Sundelbolong* (or the less catchy *Prostitute with a Hole in Her*).

Still, for the most part, the best in new Indonesian horror revives without slavishly rehashing tropes and formulaic clichés of both American and New Order-era Indonesian horror. In this way, exceptional titles, like last year's dark police procedural *Borderless Fog* or even the *Dancing Village*-adjacent *Ronggeng Kematian* (*Dance of Death*), combine genre conventions with local customs and mythology for the sake of drawing attention to post-Reform era living conditions.

The shifting role of family and religion, particularly among Muslim protagonists, is most apparent in the way that the supernatural and its religious counterparts are presented. "Islam was used during the New Order as an instrument of state control," writes Indonesian film scholar Thomas Barker in *Indonesian Cinema After the New Order: Going Mainstream*. "But now that Islam is decoupled from state ideology, young filmmakers are less inclined to portray Islam as an instrument of control in horror."

Other recent movies, like last year's *Siksa Neraka*, suggest that new Indonesian horror filmmakers are still grappling with the long shadow that religion has cast over their independence and personal decisions. Anwar notes that, "Today, religious leaders and teachers – especially Muslim teachers – don't save the day, but rather are the source of people's problems."

That shift stands out particularly in many new Indonesian horror movies

EDWIN'S *BORDERLESS FOG* WAS A DARK POLICE PROCEDURAL THAT MADE WAVES LAST YEAR.

ANWAR'S *SATAN'S SLAVES 2: COMMUNION* WAS THE FIRST INDONESIAN MOVIE TO BE SHOT ON IMAX-APPROVED CAMERAS.

given their frequent concern with Muslim protagonists that are in no small part defined by their faith and spirituality. Speaking to *The Weekly Standard*'s Daveed Gartenstein-Ross in 2006, Indonesian political commentator and podcaster Nick Grace suggested that Indonesian filmmakers like Anwar "are filling a role that the government should be playing: battling against extremism."

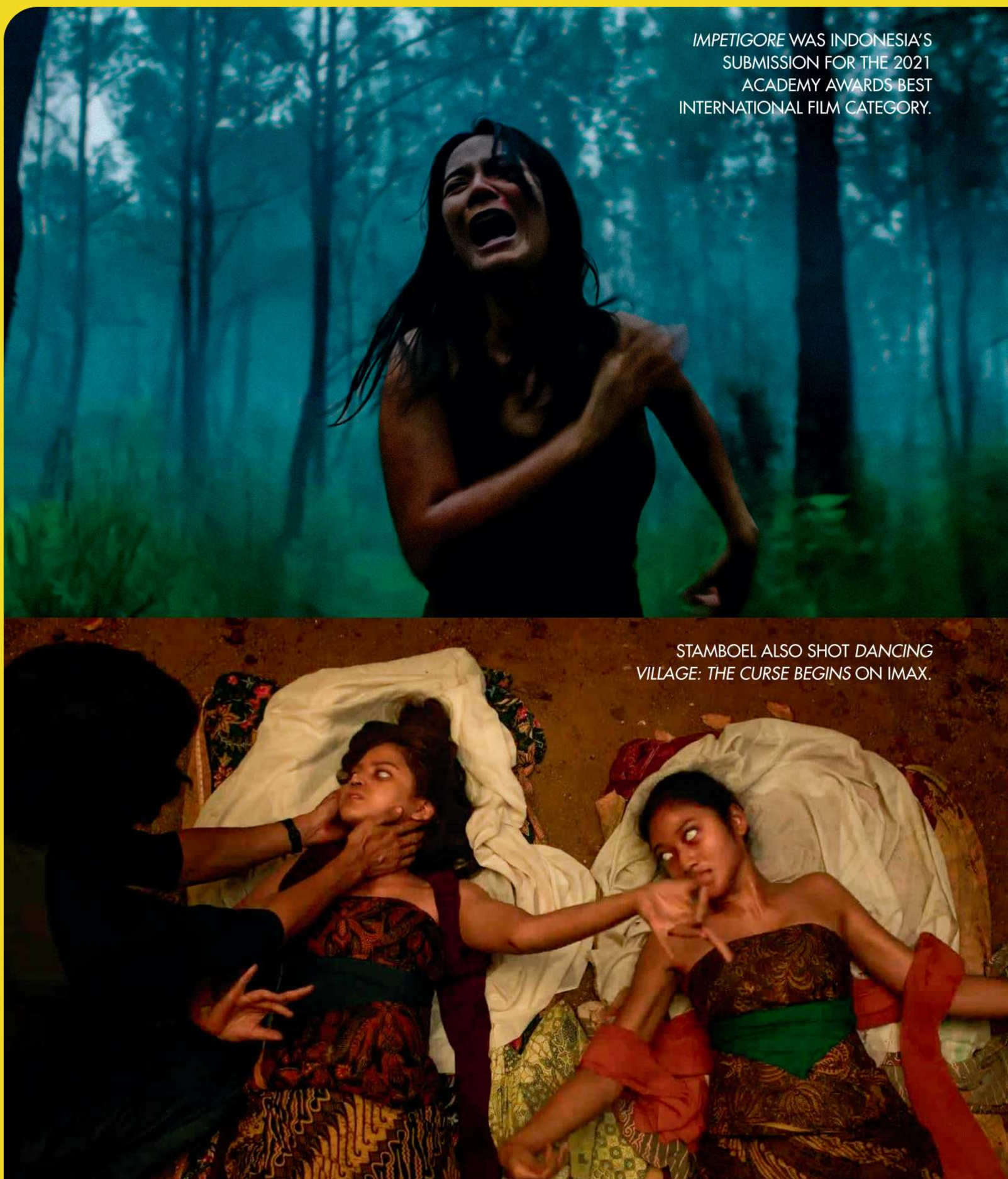
Gartenstein-Ross adds that, "Indonesia is a critical bellwether in the long war against Islamic extremism because it is the world's most populous Muslim country and has extremely porous borders. In practice, it has been home to a relatively moderate form of Islam, which is now being challenged."

A renewed focus on strong female protagonists, led by Anwar's boundary-pushing efforts, has also come to define the latest Indonesian horror movies. Anwar points to his own childhood, being raised by his mother and older sister, to explain why his female characters (both good and bad) are so much more prominent and well-developed than his men. He adds that while recent Indonesian horror movies now feature more nuanced female leads, that change isn't a result of a concentrated effort, but rather an "instinctual turn towards being inclusive."

"There are still big problems in Indonesia since women still live in a patriarchal society and all of its complications," Anwar said. "But our first woman president [Megawati Sukarnoputri] was elected a little more than twenty years ago. We've also always had the sense that women are strong, even though there is also these systems in society that suppress them. So all these strong female characters don't come from a movement, but are rather an effect of life."

The future for new Indonesian horror remains bright given the rise in prominence, quality, and respect that the country's horror filmmakers have recently attracted. "I think the world has to prepare for a new wave of Indonesian horror since there are now more legit filmmakers from Indonesia who have tapped into horror movies since they're now considered first-class," Anwar concludes.

"We have more than 200 ethnic groups in Indonesia and each of these groups comes with their own set of mythology, folklore, characters, and stories. Now there's a race to make the best horror movies out there, so keep an eye out." 💀



IMPETIGORE WAS INDONESIA'S SUBMISSION FOR THE 2021 ACADEMY AWARDS BEST INTERNATIONAL FILM CATEGORY.

STAMBOEL ALSO SHOT *DANCING VILLAGE: THE CURSE BEGINS* ON IMAX.

PHOTOS COURTESY MD PICTURES, RAPI FILMS, SHUDDER, AND NETFLIX

BY BRANDON STREUSSWIG

the POST-TRAUMATIC CINEMA of Alice Maio Mackay

The Aussie filmmaker is on her fourth feature, and she's just turned 20.

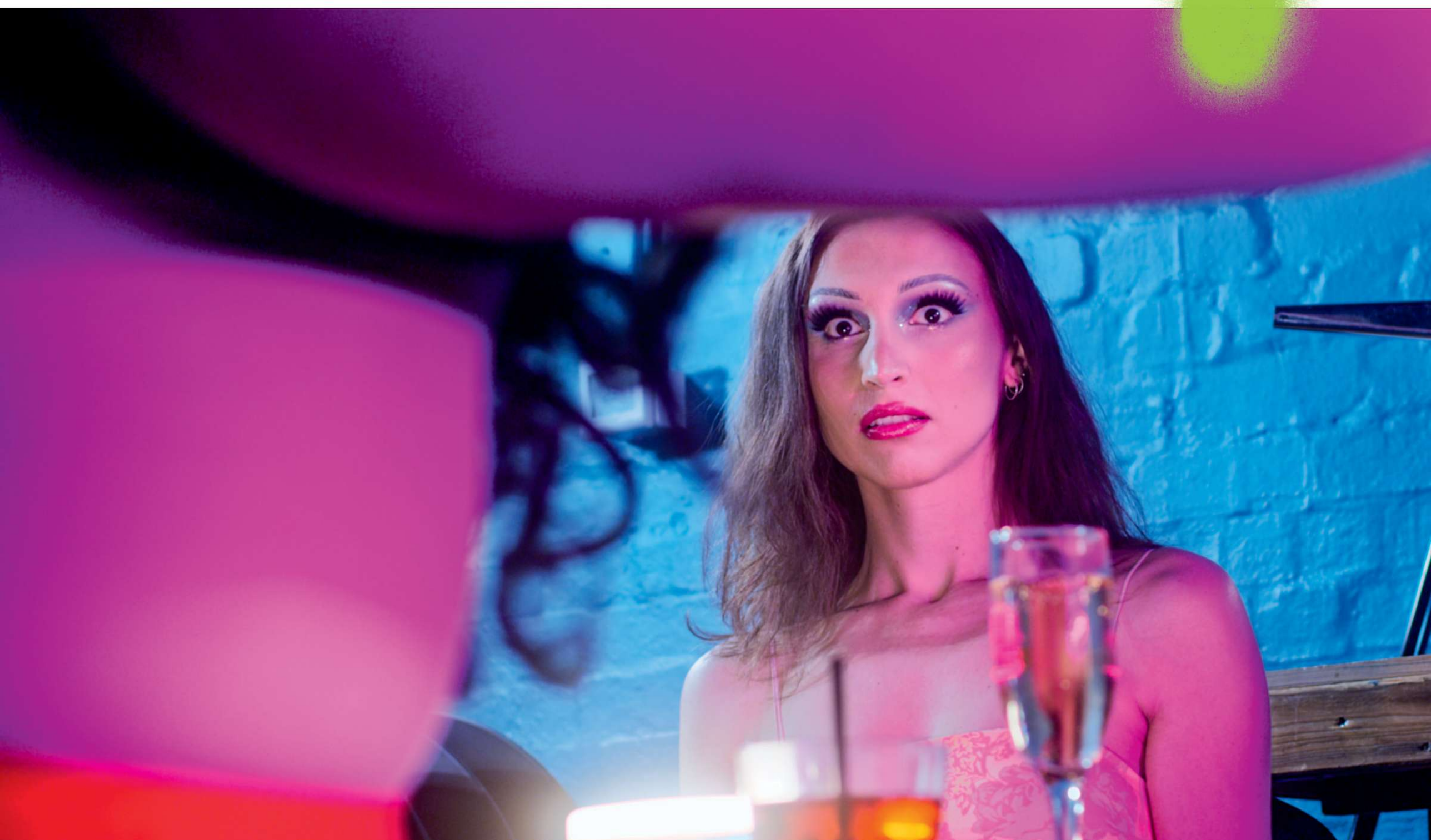
That "A Queer and Transgender Film By Alice Maio Mackay" title card hits you in front of each of her films. Like "A Spike Lee Joint," it's a stamp that doesn't just signify her as the person who made the film. With a blast of color and loads of punky attitude, it's a planting of a flag that says nobody *except* her could have possibly made it. You could read it as a political mission statement. It could be the marker for a vibrant new voice in horror. For Alice Maio Mackay, it's much simpler than that: "I just wanted to see trans people hanging out." Beyond the horror or messaging of it all, the quality that makes Mackay's work so special is the feeling of community. It's a community being built from the ground up with goo, gore, and good friends. It's what indie film was always supposed to be.

ALYSSA C. PETERS DOESN'T SEEM TO LIKE WHAT SHE SEES IN *CARNAGE FOR CHRISTMAS*.

Making a movie is tough. An obvious thought, sure, but even the most dyed-in-the-wool fan can overlook the intricacies and genuine courage it takes to pick up a camera and get something made. Some are lucky to have even one film to their name before it's all said and done. Five features to your name? By the age of twenty? That's borderline miraculous. For Mackay, it's all about time. "I've always been, I don't know, scared by the concept of time in general. And I think life is short; I don't know if it's also transitioning, I just have a weird sense of how time moves and works. I could wait to get funding for a film, or I could just go out and do it." And do it she has. After a few shorts, Mackay's first feature *So Vam*, made when she was only 16, was picked up by Shudder in 2021. From there, it was slasher *Bad Girl Boogey* in 2022 and then 2023's body-snatcher riff *T Blockers*. The latter would be but an opening salvo in what's become The Season of Alice Maio Mackay. By the end of summer, she'd released demonic delight *Satranic Panic*, and now she's getting in on the holiday horror fun with *Carnage for Christmas*.

A journey through Mackay's work reveals surprising contradictions. She's a student of splatterpunk, no question, with Joe Begos' neon-blasted horror flowing through her veins. "I'm a big Joe Begos fan. That's what really changed my life. Not even as a child, I think it was 15. I got *Bliss* and *VFW* as a Blu-ray pack, and then I found his earlier works, *Almost Human*, *Mind's Eye*, and stuff like that. I just would watch it on repeat… I was obsessed with it and still am. He was a big one in terms of that aesthetic." It's that she takes the time to let you breathe with her characters that separates her from some of the *go-go-go* nature of her blood-soaked contemporaries. It all comes back to that hangout atmosphere. Mackay isn't just centering queer and trans

Mackay has no time for belaboring obvious points. She's here to have fun, kill some demons, and spray lots of blood.



THIS PAGE AND FACING: CASSIE HAMILTON STARS IN AND CO-WROTE *SATRANIC PANIC* WITH DIRECTOR ALICE MAIO MACKAY.

THE MAGGOTS ARE A NICE TOUCH, ALTHOUGH LEWI DAWSON (IN *CARNAGE FOR CHRISTMAS*) MAY NOT AGREE.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALICE MAIO MACKAY

leads; she's creating a cinematic space for the viewer to vibe with her found families. Gregg Araki's an influence she's often cited for where this impulse comes from, but a more humorous inspiration threads the Begos-infused gore with friends getting high together and, as she puts it, "vibing": Kevin Smith. "I'm a big *Yoga Hosers* fan, not that it drew me to horror, but it was at the same time I discovered *Buffy* on TV. I was home sick from school, and I found *Yoga Hosers*. I was like, 'This is everything. It's scary, it's cunty.'"

"Scary and Cunty" is exactly what Mackay puts out into the world. It reverberates in every frame of a film like *Satranic Panic*, a road movie where a trans drag queen and her best friend investigate the death of her brother. The "scary" requirement is satiated by demonic entities possessing the bodies around them, with Aria (Cassie Hamilton) as the only one who can sense them. The "cunty" element is found in stunning musical sequences that MacKay peppers throughout, with Aria's drag performances meaning as much to the film as the horror. Like *T Blockers*, a film where bigots are the literal monsters, *Satranic Panic* deals in the same sort of self-loathing creeps who would sooner allow the supernatural to take over their bodies than make space for queer and trans people. The messaging is obvious, maybe, but unlike a current spate of more serious-minded horror, Mackay has no time for belaboring obvious points. She's here to have fun, kill some demons, and spray lots of blood.

"I don't really find it enjoyable," she says of the abundance of trauma and grief located in so much of the horror landscape. The bigots, self-loathers, and "chasers" causing all the damage in *T Blockers* or *Satranic Panic* are the vessels for those feelings. Her heroes experience that – of course they do, they're human. As they're kicking ass and dispatching demons, though, they're often in a place that's comfortable for them. They are who they are, and fuck you if you can't handle that. It's a post-traumatic cinema of sorts. "In *T Blockers*, if that was just a hangout drama film and all these shitty transphobic things happen to them, it would just be sad. They're obviously not going to kill someone in real life, but it's having them be goopy and body horror they can reclaim, and it's cathartic for me to make and hopefully for people to watch as well."

It isn't simply centering trans leads that allows for the feeling that you're watching something new and exciting. Much has been made this year about the wave of cinema from trans filmmakers that came all at once, but Mackay's work serves as almost a new kind of status quo – one where trans folks aren't just centered, they're the calm centers in a world gone entirely mad. "I just write the characters that I want to see," she says. Characters like Aria in *Satranic Panic* who can sense demons or Sophie in *T Blockers*, the only one who can sense the parasites possessing her town. These characters facilitate a sense of "normalcy."

WRITER/DIRECTOR MACKAY, CENTER, ON SET WITH CO-STARS LEWI DAWSON AND AVALON FAST.

"I want to keep making things from the heart and telling the stories that I want to see, but just on a bigger level every time and just hopefully reaching more people every time."

- Alice Maio Mackay

Mackay's work dealing in bodies being invaded allows her to explore the thematic weight of that, but she also just digs how it looks: "From a visual perspective, it's fun to play with, and you can do all sorts of things. I get to be creative, the actors get to be creative, and it's makeup and costume, all departments really get to do something unique with it." Back to those weightier ideas, though, she says, "in *Satranic Panic*, I literally use Aria's hormones to give her the superpower. And it's not even a metaphor; she's trans, and her estrogen shot literally gives her this superpower that no one else has."

Tracking this through her work is a thrill. "As I've become more comfortable in my transition and life, I've been able to explore different trans characters on screen. I say from *So Vam*, it's about a queer kid, and the person who teaches him the way and shows him his powers, it's a trans woman. It's this queer person looking up to a trans woman. And then, by the time they get to *T Blockers*, it very much centers on a trans woman's experience." There's something beautiful about seeing someone find themselves on screen through their work. That Mackay threads it so naturally, progressing from one film to the next, all told in goopy, gory genre pictures, makes it that much sweeter.

As we head into the holidays, Mackay's latest is right at home with gloppy ghosts of Christmas past like Joe Begos' *Christmas Bloody Christmas* or a classic like *Silent Night Deadly Night*. Not unlike her past slasher *Bad Girl Boogey*, *Christmas For Carnage* finds Mackay exploring the ways in which past trauma informs our present, this time with a Santa-suited killer hacking his victims to pieces. *Carnage* follows

Lola, a true crime podcaster who returns home for the holidays, her first trip back since transitioning. If the questions surrounding her identity weren't enough to contend with, Lola encounters "The Toymaker," a killer from the past who seems to have risen from the dead to finish what he started years ago. Mackay speaks to the *Black Christmas* films as a source of inspiration for *Carnage*. Still, when asked what it is about Christmas that lends itself so well to horror, she offers a unique perspective, saying, "It was interesting to explore how queer people have a complex relationship with holidays and going back home." *Carnage* represents a bit of a jump forward for Mackay in the expansion of her "worlds," so to speak, as well. There's a Stephen King-like quality to this small town and all its winding tendrils. In between the bloody, intoxicating scares, Mackay finds room to sit with a community and its secrets. In turn, *Carnage* comes alive, not just as a typical slasher, but one that exists in a fully realized place with people who've lived complex lives. It's an exciting leap for a filmmaker with many years ahead of her.

Carnage also features a collaboration between Mackay and *The People's Joker* herself, Vera Drew. Drew's credited as the editor here, and you can immediately feel her unique, *Adult Swim*-inspired style in the transitions. "I was a fan of her work, and then we became friends, and then I was lucky enough that she wanted to work on this film," Mackay says of how they became connected. With her previous work having been edited by her usual DOP, MacKay says the experience with Drew offered something a little more loose and free. "I'm so used to going from script to shooting to screen; it's very much just a linear process," she says. "But with her, I told her just go full-on with it; it's very much *Malignant* in terms of transitions."

Communities onscreen and off, you sense a theme with Alice Maio Mackay, whether in the work or in conversation with her. She was a kid who grew up wanting to express herself through cinema and, over the course of five films, she's grown into a woman who has so much to say. She's fully aware that being who she is comes with pushback from the worst kind of people, but reflecting on that, she's remarkably clearheaded, saying, "It is quite frustrating and heartbreaking at the same time. But there is nothing else I would rather do than create film. And at the same time, there has been a lot of hate but there's also been so much support from festivals and fans, and I've had so many cool opportunities. There is nothing else I would rather be doing." Once a kid dreaming of seeing people who looked like her simply hanging out onscreen, Alice Maio Mackay hasn't just realized it, she's kicked the damn door in.

Alongside her, Mackay has quite the burgeoning ragtag group that appears in most, if not all, of her work. Leads from a previous film will pop-in as fun support players in the next, and she works with the same crew behind the camera. She's an entire industry unto herself, the evolution of those indie guys like Kevin Smith and Joe Begos who influenced her as a teen.

"I want to keep growing... with each film and hopefully work with larger budgets," she says. "I want to keep making things from the heart and telling the stories that I want to see, but just on a bigger level every time and just hopefully reaching more people every time." If you thought three films in just over a year would have her slowing down, you'd be sorely mistaken. On the docket, Mackay says she has a "witchy horror film" and a "rom-com body horror."

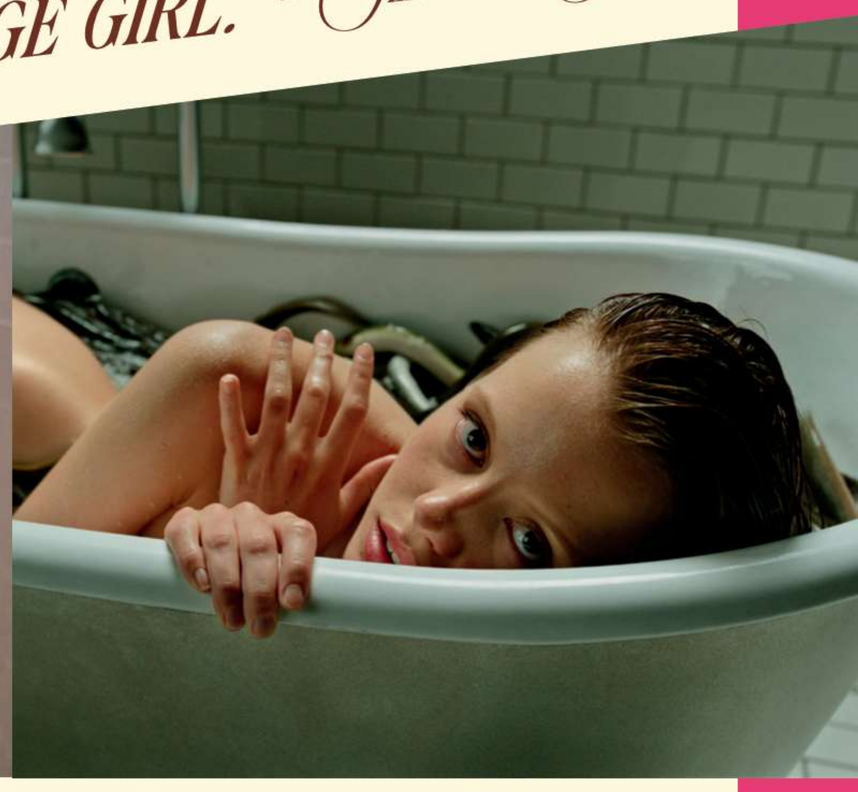
Whichever comes first, just know there's no end in sight for Alice Maio Mackay. "I want to keep doing this for the rest of my life," she says. At twenty years old, this is just chapter one. We're witnessing an authentic, singular voice explode with vibrant color and gooey, grimy viscera right before our eyes. 💀

THE BLEED PHASE

BY REBEKAH MCKENDRY

TABOO: PERIOD HORRORS

"HELL IS A TEENAGE GIRL." – JENNIFER'S BODY



SCENES OF MENSTRUAL HORROR, L-R: *RUN, SWEETHEART, RUN*; *CARRIE*; *A CURE FOR WELLNESS*.

Really nothing can prepare you for it. No talks with Mom or gym classes where they separate the girls and show melodramatic science videos or whispers among friends can prepare you for the amount of blood you'll see pouring from your body. Nothing can prepare you for the emotions you'll feel, either. It's exuberant – this is one of the clearest signs you are evolving into something different! But then there is having to worry about carrying feminine supplies at all times, plus the unpleasant symptoms including grogginess, greasiness, bloat, sensitivities to touch, nausea – and that's just scratching the surface. Plus, thanks to millennia of patriarchal societies telling us our bodies are something to be ashamed of, there is still a solid amount of embarrassment that comes along with this moment. Oh god, what if you bleed through?! That's like social death!

Welcome to the Bleed Phase (the scientific term for your period… which would also make a kickass name for an all-female punk band… just saying).

For a teen girl, periods and puberty in general can be ultimate body horror. Yes, boobs spring up seemingly overnight, and hair grows in funny places, but seeing all that blood is seriously next level. One of your inner organs is literally ripping itself apart and leaking out of your body. And you can feel it doing so! It hurts a lot, especially at the start when your body is trying to figure out how the cycles work.

So, of course this joyous and traumatic moment has made its way into horror films. But not as many as you might think. Considering half the entire population has periods, I was shocked to only find a few dozen horror films that really used the topic of menstruation as a significant plot point, making it a severely underused body horror theme.

Why are periods such an unsung topic in body horror films? First, periods are taboo. The public stigma of periods seems to be getting slightly better over time, but even when I was a teen in the late '90s, girls were taught that periods weren't to be discussed. My mom had dozens of nicknames for periods (your visitor, Aunt Flo, your "lady time") just to keep from addressing it head-on. The mere thought of having a tampon fall out of your purse was cringe-worthy.

Even today, many guys are still conditioned by society to view menstruation as repulsive. Across a variety of cultures and eras, women on their menses have been accused of everything from curdling milk to attracting bears to causing meat to spoil to being able to talk with the devil. (I wish I could talk to the devil on my period. It'd make the whole experience far more interesting.) Whether women were being ushered to the edge of the village or just told not to speak about something they spend 20% of every month doing, the track record of open discussion about menstruation has not been great. Thus, it is still a very taboo topic on-screen.

But even with our being told never to discuss periods and apparently causing all cows we touch to produce soured milk, some periods have still bled into horror films. Let's discuss the three main things that can happen if you get your period in a horror film:

PERIODS AS A SOURCE FOR TRANSFORMATION

Periods are often monstrous in horror films, or at least set a character on the path to becoming a monster. The most well-known period horror, *Carrie*, features a young girl who, though outcast, has been getting by relatively unnoticed until she gets her period and then transforms into a telekinetic monster. Similarly, *Ginger Snaps* connects a werewolf transformation with the onset of menses. In the movie *Excision*, a girl's obsession with period blood and surgery leads her to a newfound horrifying power. These transformations eventually led to their demise.

Though both transformations may seem monstrous, sometimes you just need to see the seemingly grotesque transformation from a different POV. In the film *Blue My Mind*, a girl's period is accompanied with strange fish-like changes, and though she does undergo frightening body changes, she evolves into a new sense of self.

The leading females in these films are both the protagonists and antagonists, ultimately becoming villains as their periods push them into vicious territories. These are admittedly some of my favorite types of horror films. Their body-based trauma is their passageway into another realm of knowledge, beauty and gooey surrealism. While standard final girls are often pure virgins who are forced to fight by the end, these ladies lose control of their bodies and ultimately embrace their new wickedness by deciding to burn the whole gymnasium down.

IN *EXCISION*, ANNALYNNE MCCORD'S PAULINE SHOWS ADAM (JEREMY SUMPTER) WHAT THAT TIME OF THE MONTH REALLY FEELS LIKE.

A SOURCE OF HORROR

As in real life, many horror films use the start of a girl's period as the start of a sexual awakening, and along with it all the horrors therein. In *It*, Beverly fears her period because it could worsen her father's abuse, and in part two we see Beverly drowning in a bathroom full of blood. In *Pitch Black*, the seemingly male character of Jack is later found to be female because the alien creatures can smell the blood of her period. Jack had chosen to present as male to avoid the sexual advances of the rest of the male crew.

We see a similar type of period-based sexualized horror in *A Cure For Wellness* and *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, but *Valerie* flips it most brilliantly. As Valerie begins her period for the first time, all the men in town begin to view her sexually... to grotesque proportions which include the adoration of a vampire. As Valerie rebuffs them all, she is eventually accused of being a witch and burned at the stake, but she is ultimately able to escape death with magic... good for her!

VALERIE AND HER WEEK OF WONDERS WAS ONE OF THE FIRST FILMS TO EMBRACE THE PERIOD HORROR TREND, BACK IN 1970.

A SOURCE OF UNBRIDLED POWER

Most girls discover periods as a source of personal power very early on. At minimum the topic can quickly connect you to fellow females, but even more so it can be used to repel the opposite sex. I used to have a friend in college who, any time we were approached by a guy at a bar, would quickly change our prior topic to "don't you hate when your period gets all clotty." Within seconds the unwanted male would disappear into the night. Additionally, periods are a time for unabashed emotion and self-reflection. It's a time when your body loses control, but you come out the other side feeling anew, reborn. I love these horror films because they take a furiously feminist approach to periods – this is our time to shine. *Love Witch*, *Midsommar*, *Piggy*, *Run Sweetheart Run*. And even a lot of the aforementioned transformational period films like *Ginger Snaps* and *Carrie* have strong notes of this.

Horror has long been at the forefront of confronting social taboos, topics people are scared to discuss out in the open, but that horror filmmakers love to let ooze and fester in the movies. Racism, gay rights, women's reproductive rights, immigration, AIDS, class systems... the list is endless. Horror loves to stab taboos in the eye, so let's take back periods. Let's make them powerful, mysterious... and the best time ever to fuck some shit up! Monstrous or magical, both are pure feminine power. Let 'em bleed!

And for more period horror discussion, I highly recommend the *Plug It Up* podcast.

THE LOVE WITCH (SAMANTHA ROBINSON) USES HER WOMANLY MAGIC (AND MENSES) TO BRING MEN TO THEIR DOOM.

CONCEPTING CREATURES

BY RON MCKENZIE

Leading FX artists share their creative process, from thought to monster suit.

Before latex meets mold, before pixels are rendered and animated, there's a monster waiting in the mind of its creator to be given form and substance. Enter the Creature Designer, wielding tools and imaginative solutions, to give these beings, through trial and error, an imitation of life.

I had the pleasure of talking to four such designers, all in various stages of their careers, all coming in from different angles, all answering the call: "Give my creation LIFE!"

IT STARTS WITH AN IDEA: (TOP) JARED KRICHEVSKY'S WENDIGO FROM *ANTLERS;* (MIDDLE) AN ALIEN FROM NEVILLE PAGE; (BOTTOM LEFT) MATT MILLARD'S DRACULA CONCEPT FOR *RENFIELD;* (BOTTOM RIGHT) TREVOR HENDERSON'S "THE STRANGER".

NEVILLE PAGE'S *CLOVERFIELD* CONCEPT SKETCH.

Graduating with a degree in Industrial Design, Neville Page always had an inclination towards working in entertainment. He eventually found himself applying his training and talents in a different venue, by providing concept designs for James Cameron (*Avatar*), JJ Abrams (*Cloverfield*, *Super 8*) and Ridley Scott (*Prometheus*). Page gained more visibility as one of the judges on SyFy's Makeup SFX competition series, *Face Off*, and maintains a busy schedule overseeing the visual development of many *Star Trek* projects for Paramount. In recounting his first job as creature designer on Cameron's *Avatar*, Page said, "... It was a fluke. I won the lottery. I was an industrial designer prior to *Avatar*, but I wanted to design creatures because I thought it would be fun. Everyone else's portfolio was incredible. And so I thought, 'You don't play, you don't win.' And I won!" As a first-time creature conceptualist, Page focused on his specific skills with the strengths he brought from his previous work: mechanics and practicality. Case in point? The avian Banshee.

"Jim [Cameron] wanted it to look like a barracuda and be streamlined, but when it opens its mouth: giant teeth, right? I realized when it opens its mouth, it's likely to explode because of the speed it's moving at. With artwork and various references, I explained to Jim why the drawing looked the way it did, and I remember he wasn't confused about what was happening. It was just a new way of him seeing a creature design presented. You're trying to create a product that's innovative in its utility, right? So that just made sense to me. If I'm trying to innovate a creature, nature's already done all the good stuff. What am I left with?"

For Jared Krichevsky, his career trajectory started at L.A.'s renowned visual effects college, Gnomon, where he took Creature Design as part of his curriculum. It changed his life almost immediately. "I took a class from Jerad Marantz [*Lovecraft Country*, *The Conjuring*] and when he put his work up on the screen, my eyes lit up. In my head, it was exactly what I wanted to do. It just seemed so fun and inspiring. I've always wanted to work in film, and so it felt like a calling. I was fortunate enough to get to learn from Jerad and he really helped me get my foot in the door." After graduation, Krichevsky went to work on a wide range of productions including *Pete's Dragon*, *It* and, most recently, the two most recent entries in the Monsterverse franchise, *Godzilla vs. Kong* and *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*, the latter featuring his current favorite creation, Godzilla Evolved. "To work on the big guy himself, and contribute to that legacy is, of course, enormous and mind-blowing," he shared. Krichevsky is now, like Neville Page before him, an instructor at Gnomon and has two foundational beliefs that he instills in his students. "The digital arts have two major hurdles to overcome: the first is the software and the technology, which is getting easier and more approachable every day. The second hurdle is art fundamentals, which will take you a lifetime to master. But it turns out that's a great thing, because you'll always have something new to learn and strive for. Art is an infinite well and there's a lot of things you can take from it, as well as mediums to explore." As for the biggest misconceptions about his own work, he offered, "The amount of agency that I

JARED KRICHEVSKY'S CONCEPT ART FOR PENNYWISE FROM 2017'S *IT* (LEFT) AND THE MECHAGODZILLA FROM *GODZILLA VS. KONG*.

DIDN'T HAPPEN: ALTERNATE "NOZUKI" CONCEPT ART FOR *GODZILLA VS. KONG* BY MATT MILLARD.

get on big project designs, because I'm there for the director, so it might not be decisions that I would make on my own projects. The bigger the project, the more scrutiny involved and the more people you have to satisfy up the chain from producers, marketing, etc... there's a lot of collaborations happening."

Matt Millard also made his way to Gnomon, albeit through a different route. "My grandmother and mother were watching *Face Off* and they learned of Gnomon. I was working two restaurant jobs and several side gigs just to get by at the time – I was probably 24, 25 years old. When I had the opportunity to drop it all and go pursue art, I never looked back." In his second year, Millard took Creature Design. The instructor was one Jared Krichevsky. "I was blown away that there was a possibility to be in this field. Learned a ton, worked my ass off in that last year to build a junior portfolio to my best capacity." Millard started interning with prominent concept artist Aaron Sims (*It*, *The Mist*, *Stranger Things*) before graduation and accrued steady work ever since. Millard and Krichevsky are now good friends and frequent coworkers, having tag-teamed on *GvK* and *Rampage* as well as *Creature Corner*, a live-streaming Q&A/art jam for Gnomon's YouTube Page. While every artist brings their own style and skills to the table, the process for Millard begins the same way: "The first thing I always start with is questions. You absolutely will get prompts like 'we need a monster here.' Ok. Cool. What kind of monster? What is a monster to you? Are you thinking bipedal? More animal in nature? I'm trying to flesh out what the client responds to, before I commit to any artwork off the top. Just a basic idea of what they want helps understand how to approach the gig. I assemble a loose reference board of existing creatures and characters to get an initial read on what they respond to. This always works. Keep in mind that the reference board is not your guide, but a tool for your creative mind to start with after learning what strikes them aesthetically."

MILLARD'S "RALPH" DESIGN FROM *RAMPAGE*.

IMAGES COURTESY OF TREVOR HENDERSON, JARED KRICHEVSKY, MATT MILLARD, AND NEVILLE PAGE

While newer to the field, do not mistake Trevor Henderson for a rookie. Henderson has already been earning accolades for his own work on social media with his personal menagerie, cryptids who skirt the line between ancient folklore and urban legend – the most notorious creation being the meaty and towering Siren Head. His interests, and his career, started from what's likely ground zero for many in the business: an early education via family. "It was definitely my dad. He was, and is, a lifelong horror fanatic, and his passion for the genre was infectious. Many of my favorite memories... involve hunting for and watching gross horror movies," he said. "From there, it only grew."

And grow, it has. Henderson has created a home for his menagerie in the dramatized anthology podcast, *Mayfair Watchers Society*. He's written and illustrated his first YA novel, *Scarewaves*, and done comic and novel cover art for a number of publishers. With all this under his belt, designing creatures for film was the next step.

Trevor landed his first filmwork on *Tarot*, designing the avatars of the film's cursed deck, and has completed work for Jed Shepherd (*Host)* on the upcoming video game, *Ghosts*. Henderson helped visualize the game's antagonist, The Long Lady, to be brought to life by Jim Henson Studios. When asked what creatures inspired his own aesthetic, the answer came with no hesitation: "*The Deadly Spawn*. They're basically just giant mouths full of fangs growing from crimson flesh, but it's such an instantly iconic image."

Creature designers are currently enjoying an elevated visibility and celebrity via the advent of social media, yet they also face the growing presence of Generative AI, which has become a clear and present danger to their work and livelihood. "I'm a firm believer that you had better get in first on AI," Page comments. "It doesn't mean you have to be scraping on the unethical side of it, but to just naysay it and look away is the wrong thing to do." There are issues Page has with the current state, specifically from an artistic perspective. "You've got young designers that don't have the wisdom and experience of the integrity of a living creature, and they're doing 'giant claws with giant nails, glowing red eyes' and all the clichés and tropes that I hate, but well executed in its finish and in its presentation. AI is not making it any easier, but the polish is so high now that when a person who doesn't have the insight, the education, they're blown away by the 'cleavage' of the design, by the bells and whistles and not its content. Not the heart and soul. And they don't know that it's soulless. They don't know that it's a bad thing."

While it may be challenging times as Hollywood enters a tumultuous upheaval across the board, and many directors, including Guillermo Del Toro and Steven Spielberg, have been very vocal against replacing concept artists with AI-generated content, we are still in a volatile transition stage of this shift. Krichevsky is also pragmatic but cautiously so: "It's hard to say right now, and I suppose I'll have a different perspective in a few years, but what I know is that, as a teacher, people are still interested in learning creature design and production design. I have no doubt that humans will create art regardless." But he does add, "whether the business of film thrives or not in the environment, I guess we'll have to see."

There will always be creature designers, because there will always be an audience for them. Hell, one of the first motion pictures, Thomas Edison's *Frankenstein*, was also the very first creature feature, and we've been hooked ever since. What it looks like down the road is harder to decipher, but even now, some kid is putting pencil to paper and making monsters. With any luck, even if the landscape changes, they'll be the ones carrying it forward. 💀

A TREVOR HENDERSON TRIO:
(LEFT) "MOUTH"; (MIDDLE) "CLERGYMAN";
(RIGHT) "SUNSET HUNTING."

BY ERNIE ROCKELMAN

AGFA
AMERICAN GENRE FILM ARCHIVE

RESCUING the DISREPUTABLE

FOR 15 YEARS, THE AMERICAN GENRE FILM ARCHIVE HAS BEEN RESCUING CINEMA HISTORY — ONE DISREPUTABLE TITLE AT A TIME.

What makes a movie worthy of immortality? Widely acclaimed titles like *Casablanca* (1942), *The Godfather* (1972), and *Schindler's List* (1993) are all enshrined in the National Film Registry, but what about less renowned pictures that challenge conventional tastes? Offbeat, transgressive films push the limits of decorum and conventionality. They disturb and disorient, frighten and dismay, all while forcing viewers to look at the world through a different lens. Occasionally they elevate underrepresented voices (*What Really Happened to Baby Jane*, 1963), sometimes they subvert gender roles (*Rock 'n' Roll High School*, 1979), and often they experiment with the aesthetic qualities of cinema (*Opera*, 1987). Not to mention, they're entertaining as hell. Before the days of Tubi, Shudder, and other niche streaming services, these exploitation pictures were relegated to grindhouse theaters and midnight screenings. However, thanks to the nonprofit American Genre Film Archive (AGFA), movie lovers can now enjoy their favorite cinematic oddities via home video releases and theatrical reissues.

SOME AGFA RELEASES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *BLOOD FEAST*, *CONFESSIONS OF A PSYCHO CAT*, *BLOOD FEAST* (AGAIN), AND *WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO BABY JANE*.

THE 1971 FILM *THE ZODIAC KILLER* WAS AGFA'S FIRST RESTORATION PROJECT.

The world's largest repository dedicated to genre cinema and the maverick filmmakers who created it, AGFA was established in 2009 by Alamo Drafthouse founder Tim League. Behind on rent and struggling to keep up with renovations, League proposed the idea of forming a nonprofit to save his theater. When presented with the opportunity to move his movie house to a more affordable location, he redirected resources to the preservation of lost film. Vinegarized reels and rusted film cans found safe haven in the Texas theater.

Around the same time, the community of collectors suffered a significant loss. Creator of Something Weird Video and conservationist icon Mike Vraney succumbed to lung cancer, leaving his prints collection in limbo. To secure the legacy of Vraney's work, the AGFA team reached out to his widow, Lisa Petrucci, and arranged to restore and digitize a portion of his library for mass consumption.

B-movie gems like *The Zodiac Killer* (1971), *Blood Feast* (1963) and *Confessions of a Psycho Cat* (1968) received new 4K transfers and were made available on the home market. As AGFA celebrates its fifteenth anniversary, it continues to preserve the legacy of cult horror, spaghetti westerns, eurosleaze thrillers, and chop-socky action flicks, ensuring their sublime nastiness lives on via physical media and theatrical distribution. To date, the collection holds over 6,000 35mm and 16mm prints, featuring works by sexploitation pioneer Doris Wishman, punk artists Robert McGinley and Sarah Jacobson, and existential filmmaker Werner Herzog.

These overlooked movies, forever safeguarded on AGFA's shelves, are raw (literally and figuratively) and fearless. They subvert expectations and trailblaze new cinematic techniques, all while reflecting the societal anxieties and cultural shifts of their time. "There are a lot of films in our catalog by filmmakers with a very strong vision of society and the world," says AGFA executive director Jackson Cooper. "[They] deal with hard-hitting issues in ways no other filmmaker has." The accomplishments of these filmmakers is more striking when considering the limited resources with which they were working.

Shot in the slums of Uganda with untrained actors and props fashioned from discarded trash, writer/director Nabwana Isaac Godfrey Geoffrey's *Who Killed Captain Alex* (2010) and *Bad Black* (2016) were captured on MiniDV and edited using computers built from salvaged parts. Despite their modest means, these DIY pictures rival the heart and imagination of the Hollywood blockbusters that inspired them.

AGFA's efforts to promote unique voices is enabled by their nonprofit model, allowing them to prioritize their mission over earnings, ensuring the focus remains on promoting minority filmmakers. Jackson explains, "We look at our slate of titles through a lens of what voices need to be heard from. Is there an LGBT filmmaker, a BIPOC filmmaker – and what stories need to be told?" A quick glance at AGFA's catalog reinforces their commitment to artistic freedom and the importance of diversity in cinema. Joseph Ziemba, AGFA's creative director adds, "It's a humanitarian duty for us. The movies we release we feel are important and need to be out there for a reason."

Beyond championing underrepresented filmmakers, AGFA also looks at the stories behind their movies and the experiences that influenced their work. "We center the story of the filmmaker and the importance of the film, exploring why it deserves to be saved," explains Jackson. "We tell the complete story of the filmmaker, the moment in time that gave rise to the film, and the reactions it garnered. We aim to create an all-encompassing experience when curating our films, highlighting these filmmakers who truly deserve preservation."

This focused approach has been clear since AGFA's first restoration project, *The Zodiac Killer*. A fictionalized account of the notorious serial murderer, the film imagines his killing spree as the result of his dead-end job as a postal worker and his strained relationship with his deranged father. Remarkably, the movie was produced while the real Zodiac was still at large and made as part of a complex scheme to catch him. Believing the narcissistic killer wouldn't be able to resist the premiere, director Tom Hanson handed out question cards inviting the audience to speculate about the killer's motivation. Their handwriting was secretly compared against samples from the real Zodiac, while rent-a-cops hidden in fake coolers and theater personnel sat ready to pounce on anyone who raised suspicion. "Regardless of what you think of the quality of the film, *The Zodiac Killer* deserves to be saved because it is a cultural artifact with a fascinating backstory, one you would never find in standard film history," asserts Cooper.

The Zodiac Killer lived in the Something Weird Video library until AGFA released it on Blu-ray in 2017. As the company's theatrical distribution arm grew, theatrical director Bret Berg built relationships with several boutique Blu-ray labels. After acquiring home video rights to certain properties, companies like Severin and Arrow Video would transfer the screening licenses to the archive. Now, any time a flick like *Donnie Darko* (2001), the archive's most requested title, appears on a marquee, it's thanks to AGFA.

While AGFA has found a home within the warm community of Blu-ray dealers, their relationship with Vinegar Syndrome has become especially significant. Beyond collaborating on revival screenings, Vinegar's parent company, OCN Distribution, also assists AGFA's home video division with handling their Blu-ray releases. This

BLOOD FEAST IS WIDELY CONSIDERED THE FIRST-EVER SPLATTER FILM.

partnership comes at a time when Blu-ray is not just surviving, it's thriving. "We are overwhelmed by the amount of community that supports us through our video line," says Cooper. Avid cinephiles and evangelists of film geekery are drawn to the thoughtful packaging and high-quality restorations found in collectible Blu-rays. Limited edition booklets and comprehensive bonus features intensify their desire to hold physical media in their hands. This collaboration grew even stronger in 2020 when the joy of watching movies with a crowd was abruptly taken away. As the world responded to the challenges of COVID-19, theaters began closing their doors and AGFA's income from theatrical screenings dwindled to nothing. "Our [theatrical bookings] went from being on an upward trajectory to zero," explains Berg. To address the loss of earnings, they expanded their Blu-ray line and made select titles available for online streaming. Now that theaters have reopened post-COVID shutdown, AGFA continues to put out about one Blu-ray a month.

With the significant number of titles acquired since the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, AGFA has seen its theatrical earnings rebound. "This past Halloween season we shattered our own sales records," exults Berg. "We have found, funny enough, that Blu-rays do not take away from the theatrical experience," injects Cooper. "In fact, we have found that our Blu-ray sales often encourage bookers and programmers to screen our films."

These overlooked movies, forever safeguarded on AGFA's shelves, are raw (literally and figuratively) and fearless. They subvert expectations and trailblaze new cinematic techniques, all while reflecting the societal anxieties and cultural shifts of their time.

As audiences eager to recapture that cinematic magic return in droves, repertory screenings are booming. "There's a new generation hungry for rep cinema," exclaims Ziemba. "People are rabid for it. They haven't seen anything

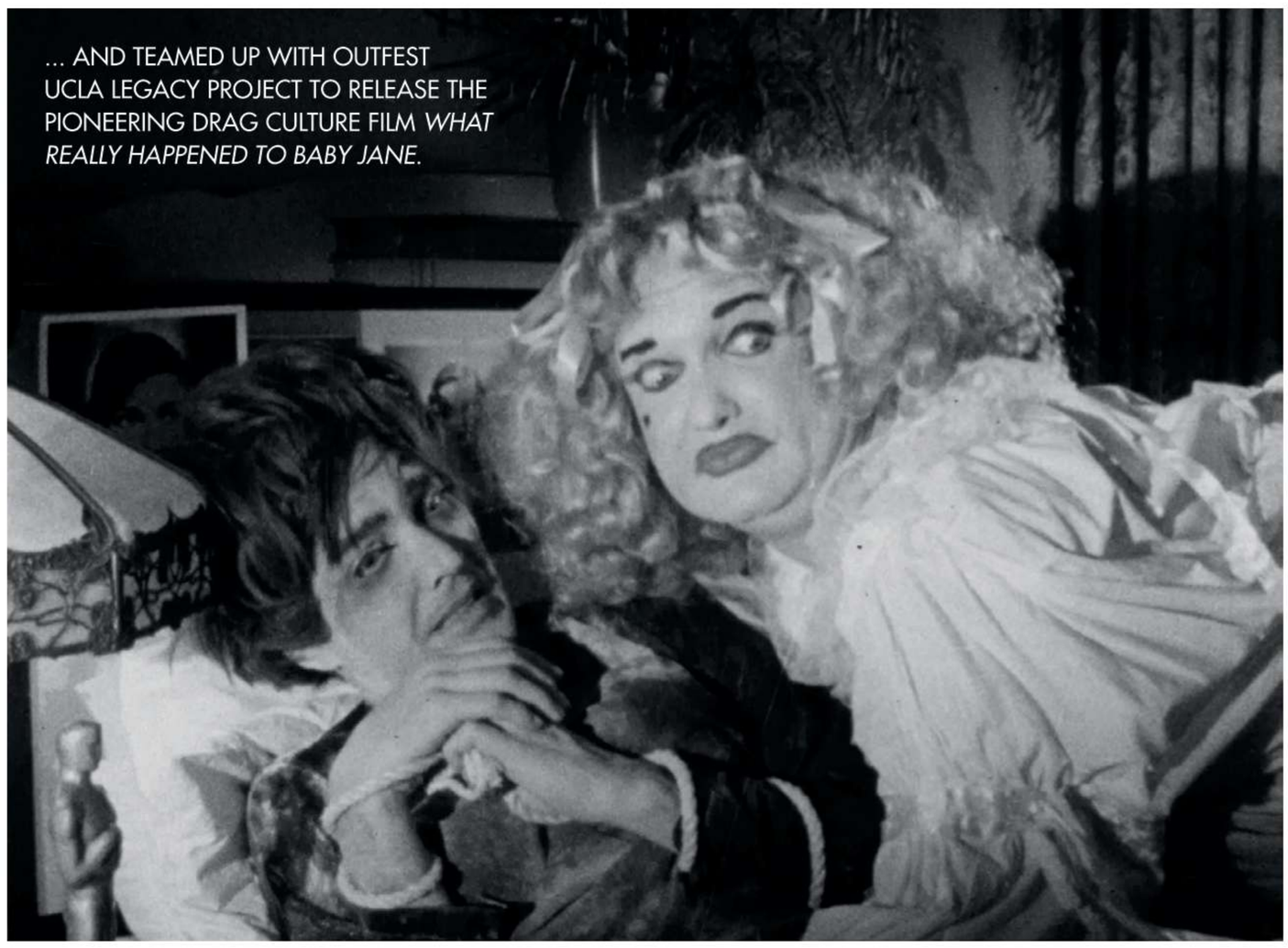
THE ZODIAC KILLER WAS PRODUCED WHILE THE REAL-LIFE KILLER WAS STILL AT LARGE, AND MADE AS PART OF A COMPLEX SCHEME TO CATCH HIM.

AGFA PARTNERED WITH SEVERIN TO OFFER A 4K RESTORATION OF DARIO ARGENTO'S CLASSIC GIALLO *OPERA*...

and they want to see everything." Berg confirms, "Going out to a rep show is now in the diet of going out for people." The successful re-releases of films like the stop-motion fantasy *Coraline* (2009) highlight the draw of movies from decades past. "There's an intense FOMO for someone who's just getting into movies and not getting to keep up."

By leaning into their knowledge of restoration and community building, AGFA is redefining the theatrical experience for audiences. "It's about marketing and getting people to show up not just once, but over and over again," explains Berg. With their mission-driven approach, AGFA supports programmers in building enthusiastic communities around repertory cinema. This has led audiences to discover maverick filmmakers who operate outside the box and without the financial backing of major studios. "There's always going to be a place in the world for people who are interested in things the mainstream ignores," explains Ziemba. AGFA supporters are finding solace in artists like Sarah Jacobson, whose blunt examination of female promiscuity in *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* (1996) challenges the restrained observations of the coming-of-age genre, and Jon Moritsugu, whose deconstructionist dark comedy *Terminal USA* (1993) dismantles racist stereotypes.

AGFA's dedication to boundary-pushing art shows no signs of slowing. Currently, they are hard at work restoring the avant-garde films of George and Mike Kuchar, as well as prepping the pioneering Black slasher *The Embalmer* (1996) for revival. Run by a small batch of film nerds who enjoy their work as much as the midnight movies they champion, the American Genre Film Archive will continue to unearth forgotten gems that may not find a spot in the National Film Registry, but are every bit as worthy of remembrance. "You're always going to find the most interesting stories below the surface," emphasizes Ziemba. Cooper adds, "We're passionate about making the collection as accessible as possible and hopefully inspiring a new generation of directors and writers to appreciate the power of outsider art and what genre film can do."



... AND TEAMED UP WITH OUTFEST UCLA LEGACY PROJECT TO RELEASE THE PIONEERING DRAG CULTURE FILM *WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO BABY JANE.*

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the VIDEO EYE of the SON of DR. CYCLOPS

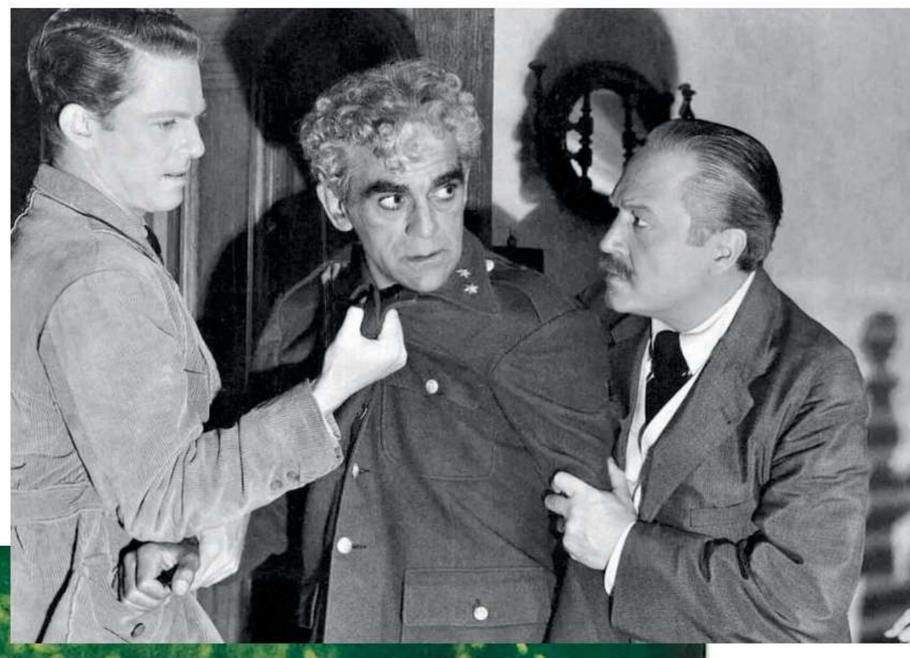
by Anthony Everitt

ISLE OF THE DEAD (1945)

Long before modern medicine was around to reassure them that their many distressing symptoms were all just in their heads, menopausal women had to break up the monotony of their misery in novel ways, such as stirring up the simmering insanity of nearby men and unleashing elemental forces of chaos, like the Furies of Greek myth. That's why I like to keep busy; give those intrusive thoughts an inch and, before you know it, some witchy, mature single is puppeteering you around all over the place. But mental hygiene is antithetical to any good Val Lewton production.

After informally executing one of his colleagues for tardiness (his one heroic act), General Pherides (Boris Karloff) can find nothing better to do during a war and potential plague than invite his field reporter friend on a dinghy ride to the island cemetery where his wife was buried. That's when he gets quarantined with a group of strangers, including a surrogate mother-type who is a bit, well, witchy. She feeds him some alternative facts about epidemiology, resulting in a borderline-homicidal fixation on another woman who's young enough to be his daughter. Surely at some point his wife would have returned from the dead to save him any further embarrassment if she could, but, in keeping with the theme, a living age-appropriate woman generously fills in by waking from a cataleptic coma, emerging from a premature grave, and killing him before flinging herself off a cliff.

There's a lesson here: aside from reading too much Freud, the General here was not "keeping busy," and look what happened. Learn from him.



THE SHE CREATURE (1956)

There are those who say you can't have enough self-confidence, but that's not entirely true. Too much and you might get cocky, getting the impression that people evolved from humanoid sea monsters which can be summoned and controlled via some inconsistent and confusing hypnotic regression plot device. Too little and you might allow your leading man to speak so inarticulately that I had to turn on subtitles just to have the slightest idea of what was going on. I know that's considered a power play in today's market for some reason, but probably not in 1956.

Could you watch *Night of the Demon* to scratch that "skeptical psychic researcher scared straight" itch instead? Sure, I probably would. I don't know how much I really needed another morality tale about fashionable wealthy people paying the ultimate price for their affected smugness, either. They clearly struggle with malaise, and can they help it if they have no creativity? Not to mention all the human traffickers and hucksters who rely on their business. But this is pretty good, and the commentary on contemporary spiritualist fads is refreshing. There's a certain whimsical self-awareness in the decision to portray the villain as a carnie in a film that's clearly exploiting the Bridey Murphy craze, even if his abilities happen to be genuine. Plus, the creature itself is arguably one of budget FX maestro Paul Blaisdell's best (complete with a nice set of gravity-resistant breasts that'd make Roger Patterson's Bigfoot jealous), and the double-exposure effect used for the spirit manifestations is fairly eerie.

PERSONA (1966)

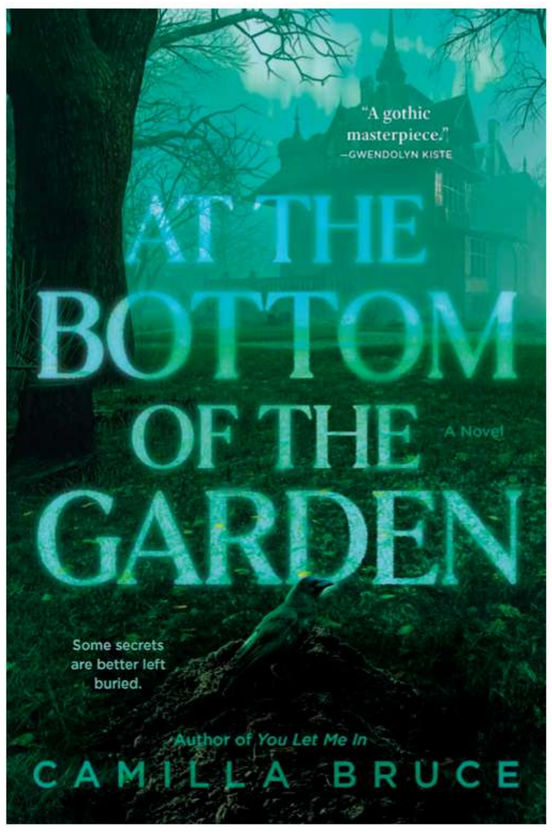
You probably noticed at some point that continental Europe is a hotspot for a very debilitating medical condition called *ennui*. Unlike its more widely accepted cousin, the "existential crisis," doctors are still puzzling over the cause of this disorder, but research has repeatedly correlated it to the trauma of suddenly realizing you're a self-absorbed, pompous asshole. For Ingmar Bergman, the subject was highly personal and inspired this surrealist psychological horror classic, humanizing those afflicted and their unfortunate acquaintances.

Fortunately, it only affects those vain and maniacal enough to presume to unveil the truths of existence through the artifice of their craft (apparently the most profound and destructive of lies, or something like that). It also affects those who've been around them long enough that the vow of silence becomes insufferably boring and a protracted monologue about the impossibility of coping with the contradictions of life seems like a welcome distraction. I did get bored a couple times myself. And finally, it affects those who've had the experience and meaning of movie-watching ontologically deconstructed and, by extension, the distinction between filmmaker and audience obliterated through carefully orchestrated, mostly macabre dream sequences that bookend and infiltrate the plot. I did like those.

Wait a minute, am I one of them now? I like writing this column and all but I'm not exactly changing lives. I do like to talk a lot, but I don't think I've been in an extramarital foursome, at least not one for which I was conscious (and would that even count?). I also haven't yet made a kid to feed my massive ego, nor have I merged personalities with anyone. Nah, I'm all right. 💀

NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN



AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GARDEN

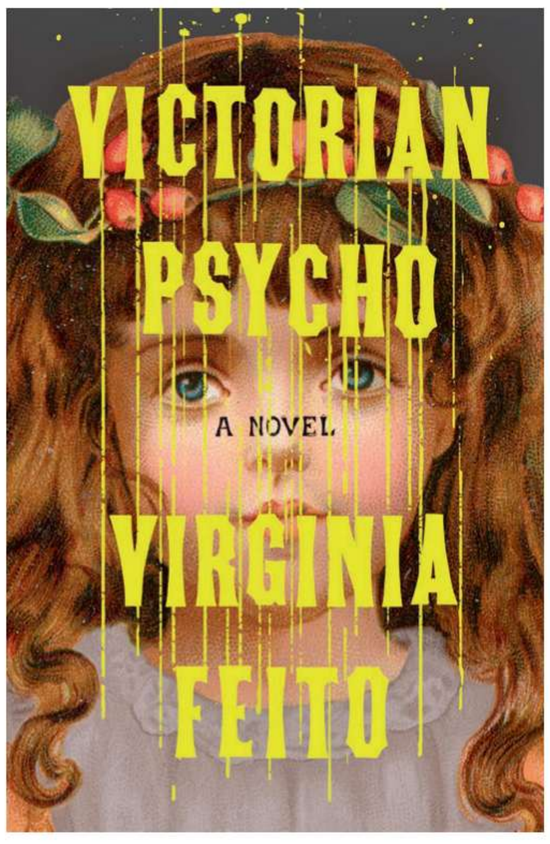
DUE OUT:
01/28/2025

AUTHOR:
Camilla Bruce

PUBLISHER:
Del Rey

Two orphaned sisters, Lily and Violet, go to live with their mysterious Aunt Clara after the deaths of their wealthy parents. Adjusting to this lifestyle is difficult for everyone, particularly Clara. As someone who loathes children, she views the girls only as a means to fund her grand business scheme. The girls only desire love and understanding, especially for their peculiar abilities. Already in shambles, their family dynamic nosedives once angry poltergeists start upheaving the house, letting loose secrets that should have been long buried.

On the surface, *At the Bottom of the Garden* is a cozy, Lemony Snicket mystery hybrid. Its dastardly storybook villain is one readers will absolutely love to hate. She brings an almost comedic air to the novel that's unexpected, but much needed. The first-person, confessional booth-style narrative combined with the lush 1970s world it's built in, gives the novel a sleek true crime doc feel. The tone is gloomy and worried, putting readers in the bleakest headspace in a snap. The description of the girls' home does wonders in evoking a dusty, tomb-like atmosphere. The author does not forgo style or personality when switching between voices, and genre elements come out in a steady drip once the main plot is established. This is where things get macabre and mystical. It's a different beast halfway through, one more akin to a V.C. Andrews tale. At once supernatural, paranormal, and homicidal, its surly vibe will have mood-readers in a ghastly state in no time.



VICTORIAN PSYCHO: A NOVEL

DUE OUT:
02/04/2025

AUTHOR:
Virginia Feito

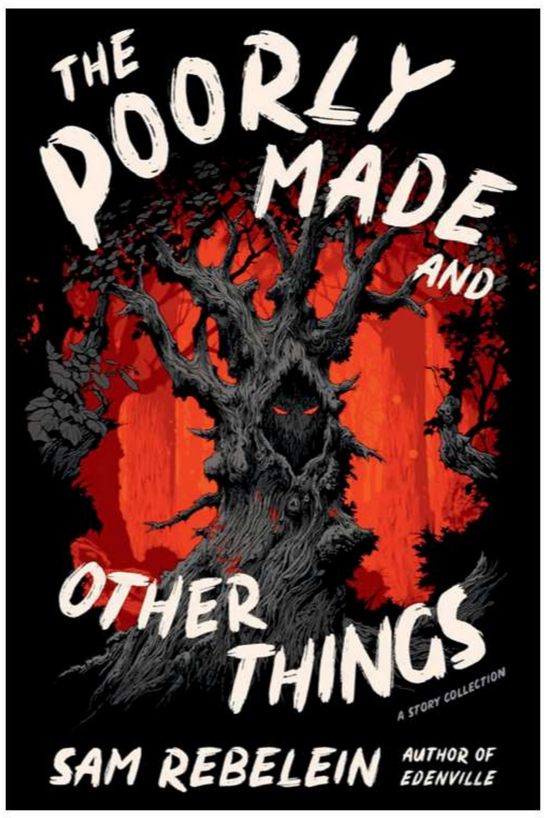
PUBLISHER:
Liveright

Ensor House has hired a new governess, one Winifred Notty, to educate and care for the repugnant Pounds children. She assures her employers that she is fit for the job and, as stated in her application, beyond agreeable. The days tick by as she learns the irritating habits and sordid secrets of the Pounds. This isn't enough to distract her from her plan, but it is enough for her mask to slip and let her compulsions break through. Infiltrating her way into the family and relishing every disturbing deed she commits, the strange governess doesn't have much time before her true face peeks through her cracking facade.

To be clear, this narrator is pure, animalist evil. Having a front row seat to her mental workings is a spectacle of insanity. But what's most gagging about *Victorian Psycho: A Novel* is how disarming Winifred can be. With a sly wink to the reader, she regales her story like a jovial fireside TV host. Despite her inclinations to bite, pet, and stab, she really is just a girl. A dead-eyed, gnashing psychopath, sure, but still just a girl. Juxtaposed to this hidden danger is her undeniable wit. It makes every repulsive detail read as eloquent. The results are conflicting and addictive, for the satirical commentary never dims on even the goriest exploits. Jane Austen would probably gasp in her grave for such a comparison, but the similarities are there with the remarks on societal stations, the humor, and the precise delivery. It's wicked historical literature at its most morbid.

THE WORD "GRIM" BOASTS SEVERAL DEFINITIONS: FORBIDDING OR UNINVITING. DEPRESSING, WORRYING TO CONSIDER. MIRTHLESS. SOMBER. GLOOMY. REPELLANT.

All these terms are fantastic descriptors that evoke distinct images of sadness and gothic drabness. The novels featured in this issue are drowning in that gray-to-black "grim" aesthetic. Put aside that cheer for a moment and let your expression sour as they drag you down with them.



THE POORLY MADE AND OTHER THINGS: A STORY COLLECTION

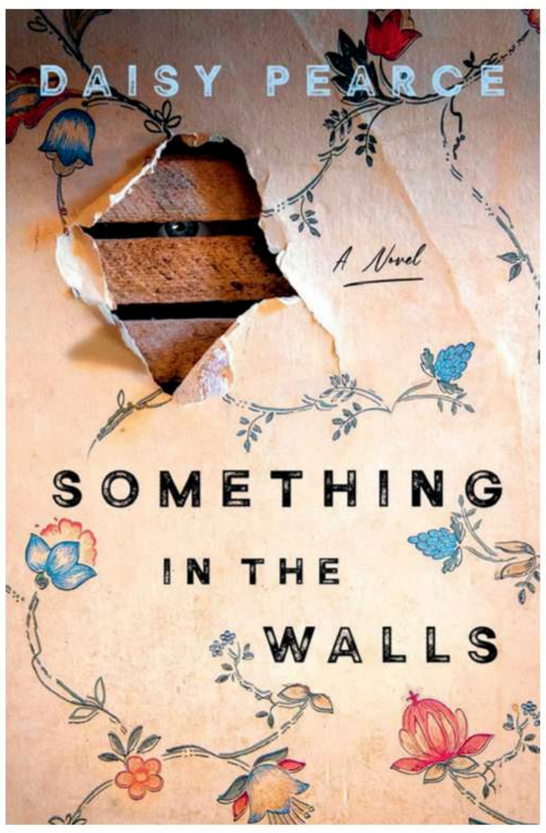
DUE OUT:
02/11/2025

AUTHOR:
Sam Rebelein

PUBLISHER:
William Morrow Paperbacks

The residents of Renfield County have never been the same, not since Lawrence Renfield massacred his family and called forth an entity called The Giant. Locals looking for morbid keepsakes callously scoured the crime scene and not even the blood-soaked hardwood was safe from repurposing. These tainted items made their way through the surrounding towns, passed from family to family, staining the lives of those most unlucky. Horrific stories of woodland beasts arose. Whispers of people in the walls followed children as they grew up. Teens went missing after searching abandoned houses. It's these bizarre stories that confirm the soil beneath Renfield is unmistakably cursed.

Each short story in *The Poorly Made and Other Things* seems designed to emotionally wreck the reader. Child eaters? Eternal torment? Sadistic surgery? Check, check, and check. Rebelein taps into what snuffs out the light of hope: desolate, coal-spirited plots and nightmarish villains devoid of remorse. The approach to the narration is experimental. Some stories begin with the same word, while others break the fourth wall. Sometimes the monsters themselves tell the story. The dichotomy between this playful style and the dispiriting subject matter is reminiscent of *Trick 'r Treat* if it were a Grimm Brothers fairytale. The wraparound story goes beyond structural support, standing firm on its own two spindly legs. The churlish population and sprawling landscape of Upstate New York inspire and cement this world in a sooty reality. Inventive and dour beyond reproach, these tales epitomize that sinking feeling as everything goes wrong.



SOMETHING IN THE WALLS

DUE OUT:
02/25/2025

AUTHOR:
Daisy Pearce

PUBLISHER:
Minotaur Books

Life is on track for Mina Ellis. Engaged and just starting out as a child psychologist, everything makes sense until she meets Sam, a journalist chasing a story of a supposed haunting. The afflicted? A teenager named Alice who claims a witch is living inside her. Mina agrees to visit the girl in her remote Cornish village to rule out any mental health concerns. But what greets her is, not viable answers, but superstition and distrust. As she and Sam continue to pry deeper into these strangers' lives, the more unexplainable things they witness, and an unfounded fear infects them both.

What strikes readers first about *Something In The Walls* is its immediate sense of oppression. Doubt and stagnant grief weigh Mina down. She's shackled by logic when confronted with the impossible. The setting is claustrophobic, intensified by a sweltering heatwave. These factors combine to form a chokehold that hardly ever relaxes. There are no moments of safety, as author Daisy Pearce harnesses every sentence into a weapon. The incensing themes of misogyny and hysteria reinforce this strong sense of threat. The eeriest hallmarks of possession horror serve as its main attraction: unnatural smiles, scratching sounds, and waves of primal dread. But the overarching storyline is that of a classic folk horror, composed in a concise, razor-edged narrative. Pearce gives just enough to let your imagination go haywire, resulting in crushing creepiness and paranoia. So, do your best not to look over your shoulder – the terror sneaks up on you when you least expect it.

Contributors' Crypt

Here's where you can follow some of our contributors on Instagram. Be polite!

Sean Abley ..... @seanabley

Simon Abrams ..... @simonsaybrams

Brett W. Bachman ..... @brettwbachman

Meredith Borders ..... @mereborders

Kolleen Carney Hoepfner .. @kolleenbee

BJ Colangelo ..... @bjcolangelo

Brian W. Collins ..... @brianwcollins

Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton

Dane DiLiegro ..... @dd

Matt Donato ..... @donatobomb

Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines

Josh Ethier ..... @joshethier

Stephen Graham Jones .....

..... @stephengrahamjones

Rebekah McKendry .@rebekahmckendry

Richard Newby ..... @rnewb

Ron McKenzie ..... @ronniemick

Ernie Rockelman ..... @erockelman

Brandon Streussnig .....

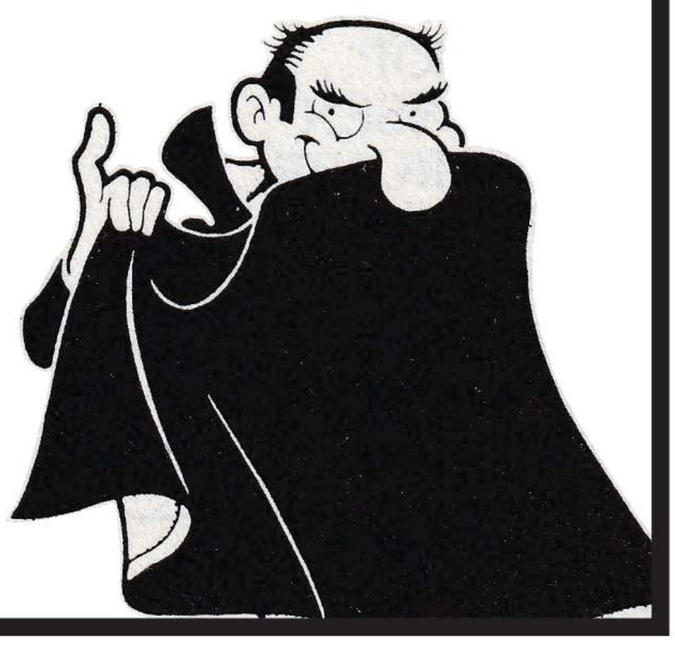
..... @brandon_streussnig

Vannah Taylor ..... @sirendeathcult

Tony Timpone ..... @timponetony

Things to Come

This spring brings the return of several things: Christopher Landon is back with DROP; and a favorite franchise returns to screens after 14 years with FINAL DESTINATION: BLOODLINES! We'll see what else sprouts from the earth after the winter thaw... perhaps a CORNFIELD, with a CLOWN in it...?



CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

For sale: near complete Vampirella Collection 1978-1980. Short box of 160 Vampirella issues from 1994-2019 (special, holiday & anniversary). 40 Vampi issues. All VF condition, bagged and boarded. Call 832-468-1311 if interested.

I'll love you forever, Zelda Hermione Oy Borders-Schlabach. Caring for you was the best job I'll ever have.

I just want to thank the good people of Fangoria for speaking up for the marginalized and downtrodden in the last few years. - Ruby Tombsday

Mark Vomit digs through old found vhs tapes and pulls clips and gifs, so you don't have to rely on the algorithm.

Kimchi! Thank you for always talking with me about horror and other weird things we enjoy! Thank you for all the movie recommendations!

Some of y'all have never seen Dracula turn into a giant praying mantis to kill a man and it shows.

Certified Forgotten is a weekly podcast focusing on overlooked genre titles with ten or fewer reviews on the aggregator site Rotten Tomatoes. Hosts Matthew Monagle and Matt Donato welcome creator, filmmaker, and critic guests like April Wolfe or C. Robert Cargill, who bring a "forgotten" horror title they passionately champion that fits the criteria. https://apple.co/4g47lcL

McDonald's is full of snitches. Support small businesses! Dirty Martin's forever.

I wonder if someone will try to do At the Mountains of Madness for the big screen. - Don Lengel

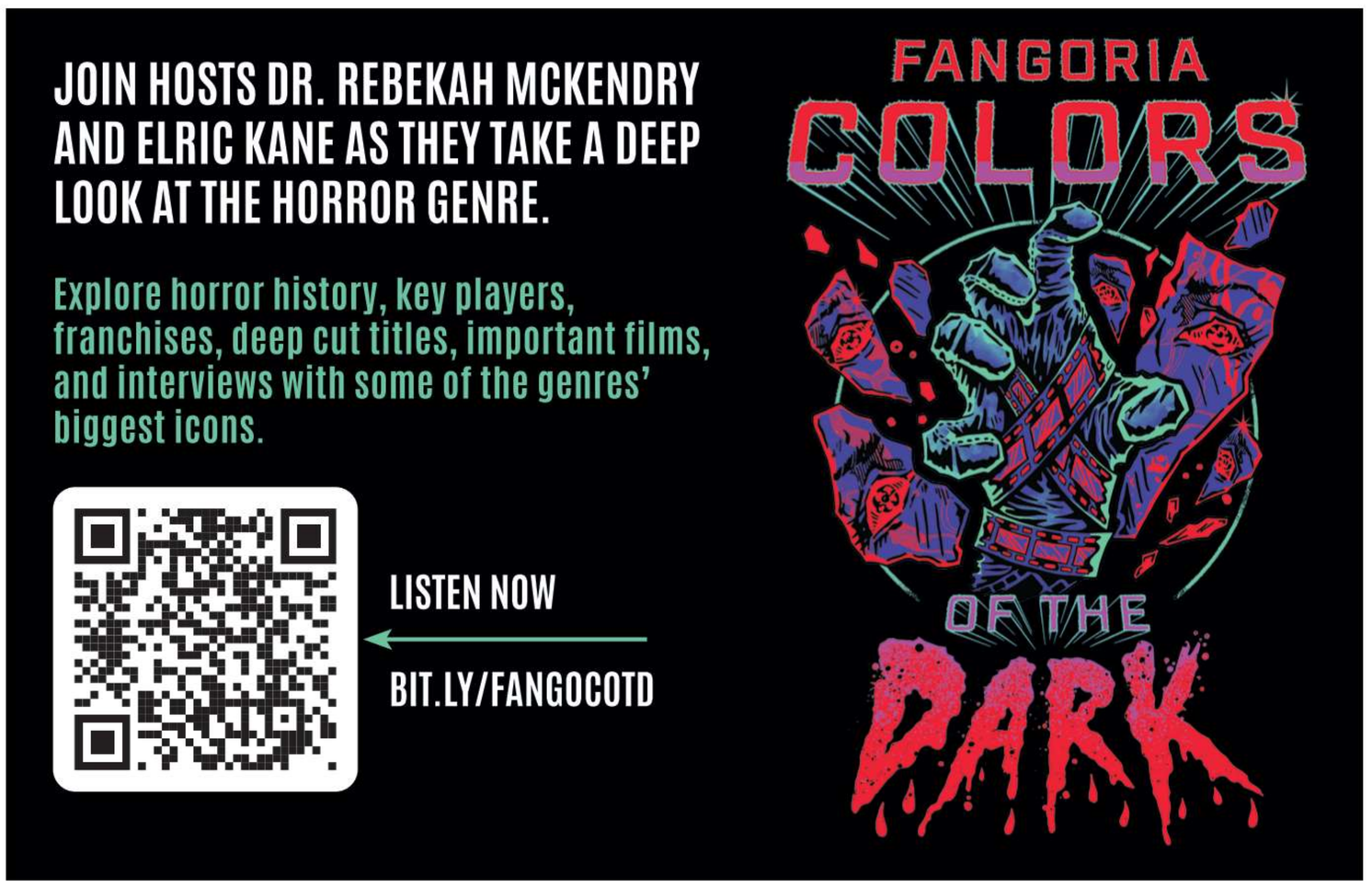
Spank, you survived 2024 like a champ. I know you're going to beat 2025's ass.

Scott, you missed a bunch of cool stuff. And a bunch of horrible stuff. All of it would've been better with you here.

Seeking slightly used sarcophagus bed at a deep discount.

Happy holidays to all you wonderful ghouls. Thanks for another wonderful year of letting us haunt your screens and your mailboxes. - Angel

Blood, Guts, and sharp fangs are on the menu for the new year at ROTTEN FM (@rotten_fm)! A podcast hosted by feral chronically online women that covers your favorite Horror movie and Metal music selections! Available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts!


JOIN HOSTS DR. REBEKAH MCKENDRY AND ELRIC KANE AS THEY TAKE A DEEP LOOK AT THE HORROR GENRE.
Explore horror history, key players, franchises, deep cut titles, important films, and interviews with some of the genres' biggest icons.
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NEON

THE MONKEY

is the new trip from writer/director **Osgood Perkins**. Based on the short story by **Stephen King** and produced by **James Wan**. It is a film chock-full of bloody violence and death.

All of these deaths are **outrageously gory** and **thoroughly gratuitous**. And while some are deserved, others are a case of 'wrong place, wrong time.' It's like life in that regard.

Instruments of death in this feature film include (but not limited to): a harpoon gun, a shotgun, a bowling ball, a hibachi knife, a swimming pool, a surfboard, a lawnmower, and a stampede of wild horses.

The hard truth is that **everybody dies, and that's fucked up**. But at least now you can enjoy death with your friends and loved ones in the comfort of your favorite movie theater **this February**.

IN THEATERS 2.21.25